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A

TWISTED SKEIN:

OR,

OUT OF THE TEMPEST.

BY

CELIA E. GARDNER,

AUTHOR OF

"STOLEN WATERS,"

"BROKEN DREAMS," "TESTED,"

ETC., ETC.

"Two shall be born the whole wide world apart,
And speak in different tongues, and have no thought
Each of the other's being, and no heed;
And these o'er unknown seas to unknown lands
Shall cross, escaping wreck, defying death,
And all unconsciously shape every act,
And bend each wandering step to this one end:
That one day, out of darkness, they shall meet,
And read life's meaning in each other's eyes."

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SAMUEL STODDER,
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TROW
PRINTING AND BOOK-BINDING CO.
N. Y.

TO

Minnie,

MY SISTER, COMPANION, FRIEND.

IN REMEMBRANCE

OF COMMON SORROWS, AND COMMON JOYS—

THE SOMBRE AND GOLDEN THREADS TWINED THROUGH OUR UNITED LIVES,—

I Dedicate

THIS

"TWISTED SKEIN,"

WITH THE AUTHOR'S UNCHANGING LOVE.

1881. C. E. G.

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A TWISTED SKEIN.

PRELUDE.

I.

A LARGE and lofty room!
From floor to ceiling books, in many a tongue;
Between the cases portraits old are hung;
From cosy niches sculptured marble gleams;
And fitful moonlight through deep windows streams;
The corners wrapped in gloom;
Soft carpets hush each footfall on the floor;

Large tables are with papers scattered o'er;
Great walnut chairs to lazy ease invite;
The windows, filled with flowers pale and bright,
Are hung with curtains warm;
An easy chair is drawn before a grate
Wherefrom the coals that glow, and radiate,
And drop to ashes in the pan below,
Send flashing out their ruddy, fitful glow
Upon the slender form
Of her, who, in the evening's deep'ning gloom,
Sits in the half light of the dusky room,
Alone, while drear without the Autumn wind
Rattles and taps at casement, door, and blind,
With sigh, and shriek, and moan—
A moment lulling, then, with blast more loud,
Driving before its breath each angry cloud
Against the sky so threateningly piled,
Freighted with Autumn tempest fierce and wild;—

With the drear night, alone!
Lone, in the sumptuous home she calls her own;
In this great world, so full of love, alone!

II.

A winning, fair-browed face!
Rich, heavy braids of waving chestnut hair;
Soft cheeks, youth's roses bright still ling'ring there;
Eyes, sad and wistful, large, and brown, and deep;
A mouth with proud, imperious curve and sweep;
A form of lightsome grace,
Dark-robed, and drooping in the great, deep chair;
Her round chin resting in her palm so fair;

While over her the flick'ring firelight streams,
Touching the brow and cheek with loving gleams;
And now and then a ray
Of silv'ry moonlight faintly struggles through
The murky clouds that veil the star-gemmed blue
And with an effort to dispel its gloom,
Creeps for a moment in the darksome room,
Through curtains drawn away.
While in the hall a clock of ancient days,
Tolls *one*, and *two*, and *three*, and *four*, nor stays
Till, in the hush of old Boreas' knell,
Twelve deep vibrations, slow and solemn, swell
Upon the midnight air.
Then swift the pennons of the brooding storm—
As though the pealing notes had struck to warn
The storm King of the designated hour
When he should loose his mighty, pent-up power—

Are floating every where.
And with one flash from heaven's heaviest gun,
One sharp report, the battle is begun.

THE ARRIVAL.

I.

FIERCE roars the tempest-war!
The battle clamour swells more near and hot;
Against the windows beats the frozen shot;
Across the skies the blazing pennons stream;
The battle trumpets shriek, and howl, and scream;
Now near, and now afar,
Still comes the flash and boom, the flash and boom
Of heaven's guns. And in the dusky room,
One moment wrapped in deepest gloom of night,

And in the next ablaze with livid light,
The lady's shrinking form
Now bends in terror by a fireless grate,
When—hark! was that the clang of massive gate,
By human hand impatient fiercely shut?
And that the tramp of iron hoof? or but
The war-steeds of the storm?
Tramp, *tramp*, TRAMP, TRAMP, along the gravelled drive!
A *phantom* steed, if not a thing alive!

II.

Still sounds the mystic prance!
A moment silenced by the fearful roar
Of battle storm without—which lulls once more,

And on the drive the iron footfalls ring; ———
Distinctly heard each hoof's impatient fling—
A pause, and then advance!
The door is reached—the clatt'ring hoof is still!
A moment's breathless hush of heart and will—
And then, on oaken panels, loud and fast,
Rain heavy blows.—Fierce swells the tempest-blast.
Upright in easy chair
The lady starts; the while with straining ear
She listens, breathless with a nameless fear.
An aged servant stumbles through the hall,
The massive doors unbarring, with the call
"What means this din? Who's there?"
The lady creeps into the darkened hall,
And listens for an answer to the call;
When faintly, through the heavy, oaken doors,
A distant voice in deep, wild tone implores
"For God's sake, let me in!

Through pathless woods for many a weary
league,
O'er hill and dale, across lone moors and bleak,
Since break of day I've travelled, fast and far,
And braved the might of heaven's roaring war.
I pray thee, let me in!"
"Unbar the door!" the lady's soft tones call;
"And lead the faithful steed to sheltered stall."

III.

Back swings the oaken door.
The old man's torch lights up the dusky hall,
As from the gloom without a figure tall,
With cap drawn low, and muffled to the chin
In dripping garments, hastily stalks in.
Upon the marble floor

His spurred heel rings; and in his dark-gloved
hand
A jewelled whip is held. Used to command
The deep low voice in which he speaks again:
"My faith! a fearful storm! this frozen rain
Cuts to the very bone.
I lost my way just after night came down,
And thus was forced to bear the tempest's frown.
Rejoiced at last I reached your massive gate.
God pity every trav'ler, who, belate,
Must breast this storm alone!
The war of elements, although sublime,
Proves fatal to the houseless wretch in time."

IV.

The torch, with silver sheen,
Lights up alone the outer vestibule,

But on the stalwart stranger glances full,
While from the farther end of dusky hall,
The lady gazes on the figure tall,
Herself unknown, unseen.
She marks the tow'ring form, the bearing high,
low, deep tones, the flashing eagle eye.
Then glides along the echoing marble floor,
Nor speaks, nor pauses till she stands before
The wond'ring stranger there.
Surprised he gazes on the girlish form,
In heavy sable robes; the face so warm;
The lustrous, soul-lit eyes of chestnut brown;
The proud, sweet mouth; the regal brow, with
crown
Of braided, gold-brown hair.
Then bowing low before the lady fair,
His cap he raises from his dripping hair,
And says, in tones with def'rence gentle made:
"I crave your pardon, lady, for this raid

Upon your lonely hall.
The night is black as raven's dripping plume;
The tempest roars like trump of final doom;
So let the storm that rages fierce without
Excuse, I pray, my clamour—blow and shout—
This forced, untimely call.
And let your kindness grant the boon I crave,
A friendly shelter while the storm shall rave."

V.

The lady makes response
With gentle dignity, and gracious smile—
Her curious gaze regarding him the while—
"You're welcome, sir, to this, my 'lonely hall,'
And pardoned for your 'forced, untimely call.'
Rest easy, for the nonce.
And John, bring lights to brighten up the gloom

Which fills the corners of yon darksome room,
Save when the lightning's fitful, lurid glare
Creeps in, and lingers for a moment there.
I pray, sir, come at once!"
Back to the empty room she leads the way;
The stranger following with brief delay.

IN THE LIBRARY.

I.

BRIGHT roars the new-born fire.
Within the cheerful open grate piled high,
The coals in golden brightness glowing lie,
Across two figures send their ruddy rays,
And dance and flash in blue and crimson blaze.
The flames leap high, and higher.
Bright lights from dusky corners chase the gloom;
With lustrous radiance fill the lofty room;
Glance on the rich-bound books that line the wall;

On pictures fair, on flow'rs and statues fall;
On curtains warm and red.
Then racing down the fine apartment's length,
Throw into strong relief the manly strength,
The stalwart form, the bearing proud and high,
Of him who shows in every flash of eye,
Each bend of haughty head,
His admiration for the woman fair,
Who sits in graceful ease in easy chair,
A picture of unconscious girlish grace
In pose and figure, smiling, fair-browed face,
And proud, yet gracious mien.
With beautifying touch the firelight's sheen
Lights up each detail of the witching scene;
With rosy flushes paints the fair, soft cheek,
And turns to gold the banded braids so sleek
With every fire-flash keen.
The stranger's sense the picture so enchants
His heart he's losing with each ling'ring glance.

II.

And still the storm doth moan!
Still howls the wind in dreary wildness past;
The icy rain falls thicker and more fast;
The thunder rolls with loud unceasing din;
And luridly the lightning's glare shoots in;
The while with air and tone
Of graceful def'rence for the lady fair
Who sits so near him in her easy chair,
The man relates what him of late befell
By bosk and down, by streamlet, mount and dell,
Through forests dim and lone.
How one obstruction scarcely had been passed
When swift uprose a greater than the last;
While dark and darker grew the roaring night,
And fast and faster flashed the ghastly light
Of blue electric flame,
Until before his weary, dazzled eyes,

He saw at last this noble mansion rise.
The lady listens to the thrilling tale
With flatt'ring interest, and cheek which pale
With sympathy became,
As thus the stranger to relate attempts
The night's disasters, and the day's events.

THE STRANGER'S STORY.

I.

" REY broke the cheerless dawn!
The chime of matin-bells had scarcely ceased,
And morn was blushing in the golden east
As rosily and coy as if the day
Had never wooed before the maiden grey,
When o'er the grassy lawn,
The gravelled drive, the rustic, echoing bridge,
Through leafy lane, o'er hillock's rugged ridge,
Through park, and clanging gate, to lone high-way,
Straight on the course o'er which my journey lay,

My steed's hoofs clatt'ring rang.
The sun climbed high above the eastern mount;
Threw diamond sparkles on the wayside fount;
On dusty road left slanting bars of gold;
Looked into leafy homes with glances bold;
The birds awoke, and sang.
In joyous trills the morning song began;
Through leafy aisles and nave the chorus ran;
Up through the arches of the templed grove
Arose the song of grateful praise and love;
My ear the music caught;
Deliciously the notes the silence broke;
To ravishing reply the echoes woke;
A thousand songsters caught the sweet refrain,
Took up the notes and sent them back again
With added sweetness fraught;
The air was full of melody and song,
And clear as mountain streamlet, pure, and strong.

With sentimental sigh the morning breeze
Made love to all the gaily-vestured trees ;
With blushing leaflets danced ;
Coquetted with the shadows underneath ;
Dared in my face with saucy coolness breathe ;
Kissed wantonly the cheek of wayside pond
Which laughed and dimpled at caress so fond.
The royal day advanced.
The country sounds fell cheerful on my ear ;
The crow of self-conceited chanticleer ;
The neigh of lab'ring steed ; the low of kine ;
The call of harvester ; the echoes fine,
All but the charm enhanced.
The scene was perfect to my 'raptured eye,
And with a pure delight my heart leaped high.

II.

" Thus sped the golden morn.
At noon I reached a rustic, wayside inn,
As picturesque as artist e'er could limn,
And paused awhile to rest my gallant steed,
And satisfy my nature's craving need,
As blast of merry horn
Rang out upon the echoing mountain air,
Proclaiming rest and food awaited there,
The wearied stranger's cravings to supply.
My steed with speed provided for, then I
At rustic meal sat down.
The butter was like rolls of molten gold;
The milk as sweet and rich, and icy cold;
The bread was light, and white as mound of snow,
Fresh eggs, and ham as pink as sunset's glow;

And, richly crisp and brown,
The speckled trout, fresh drawn from mountain brook.
'Twas feasting at the board to only look.

III.

"The mid-day meal was o'er.
My steed, refreshed by rest and garnered grain,
Soon grew impatient to be off again;
To reach my journey's end long was the way;
Thus haste behooved me. Short'ning then my stay,
I rode from hospice door.
Like recollections of a pleasant dream,
That scene of beauty and of peace supreme
Still lingers in my mind, as, drawing rein
Just ere I reached the bend of road again,

I wheeled for one last look.
Far in the background rose the tow'ring mounts,
Festooned with many a richly-colored flounce
Dyed red, and purple, gold, and russet brown,
And with a crest of sunlight for a crown.
A singing, laughing brook
With joyful bound leaped down the mountain side,
Its waters gleaming like a silver tide—
Flew gaily on—o'er dizzy ledges tossed—
And rippled 'neath the bridge I late had crossed,
Then laughing, danced along.
A perfect picture of sublime repose,
The simple, humble dwelling nestled close
Within the lofty mount's protecting arms,
Safe sheltered from the tempest's rude alarms,
In clasp so fond and strong.
With gable ends, and sloping, low-eaved roof;
Small casements from each other far aloof;

A wide, deep porch where sunlight lingered soft,
And climbing roses waved their blooms aloft
In roses' blooming time.
A fountain, rude and rough, but, like the rest,
In every outline sweetly picturesque,
Was forced to lawn from mountain brooklet near,
And man and beast supplied with nectar clear,
And sweeter far than wine.
Far in the distance on the other hand,
Spread level fields, until the verdant land
Was melted in the depths of panting sea,
Which stretched beyond the reach of grassy lea
A faint, blue, limpid line.
And over all the beautifying glow
Of mid-day sun in shim'ring golden flow.

IV.

"And thus the day passed by!
The sun went down in clouds of red and gold,
Which shortly paled to colors grey and cold;
And on the confines of a dusky wood
When night came down so bleak and drear, we stood,
My trusty horse and I.
Two paths stretched outward in the greenwood shade;
Irresolute a moment here I stayed,
Then chose the right;—alas! it proved to be
The *wrong* instead, as you will shortly see.
The night grew black apace.
At first the path was smooth, and all went well.
The moon, with fitful sheen through tree-top fell,

And glanced across the winding greenwood road,
The long, dim aisles with rare distinctness showed,
To beauty touched the place.
But soon no more the silver gleam shone through;
The pathway wilder with each moment grew;
The wind rushed thro' the boughs with mournful blast;
Yet still I onward pressed, until at last
I struck an open plain.
Myself congratulating on the speed
With which all barriers had been passed, my steed
With kind encouragement I onward urged;
But ere we scarcely from the wood emerged
A hand was on my rein.
The rolling clouds above one instant rent;
The moon one gleam across my pathway sent;

Revealed the ruffian's form from heel to head,
As in a rough, deep voice he gruffly said:
'Your money, or your life!'
My blood was up, and with defiance boiled;
My trusty horse beneath his grasp recoiled;
And when I spoke, my faith! I think my tone
Was resolute as was the ruffian's own:
'Nor money, nor my life!
Let go my rein and stand aside,' I said,
'Or else—I warn you—on your own base head
The consequences of your act abide.
Let go my rein, I say, and stand aside.'
The ruffian held his ground.
'Your money or your life!' he muttered low.
My whip came down with sudden, stinging blow—
I struck the rowels in my faithful steed—
He reared—the rein from ruffian grasp was freed—

Then with a single bound,
And trampling 'neath his feet my fallen foe,
Leaped onward, swift as mountain streamlet's
flow.

V.

"Smooth now the way became.
The road was plain, the moor stretched wide be-
fore;
The level path my horse strode swiftly o'er;
The threatened storm still in abeyance held,
Though distantly the mutt'ring thunder swelled,
The coming war to' proclaim.
Then nearer rolled the rumbling, boding sound;
The lightning's flash lit up the scene around;
Large drops of rain plashed fiercely in my face;
The tempest now was drawing on apace,

When treach'rous soil gave way.
Deep into marshy loam my steed's hoofs sank;
He floundered bravely, though to foamy flank
The leechy soil was downward drawing him;
He still resisted, while in every limb
He trembled with dismay.
But added danger was delay and rest.
I patted, coaxed, and urged, until with zest
My panting horse the fearful strife renewed;
I still persuaded; with new strength imbued
He struggled valiantly.
Now scarce to dripping fetlock did he sink;
My courage swift expanded, but to shrink
With new despair, as deeper than before
The treach'rous soil his trembling limbs once more
Drew down relentlessly.
Again he rose; yet firmer grew the ground;
Safety approaching seemed with every bound,

When, as before, I felt with shrinking dread
The fickle soil give way beneath his tread;
Once more was hope dashed low.
Half in despair, half courage to regain,
I stood in silence while the plashing rain
Beat, cold and pitiless, upon my head;
The thunder boomed; the darting lightning shed
O'er all a ghastly glow;
Revealed of level moor the reaches bare,
While pointing out no path of safety there.
But knowing well delay like this was death,
Once more I urged him though with falt'ring breath,
His failing strength to' employ.
In vain at first were all my efforts made;
Then my good horse one struggle more essayed;
Again the ground more firm and solid grew;
More shallow mire each mad leap took him through

Until, entranced with joy,
I heard his light hoofs ring on flinty ground,
And knew the danger passed, and safety found.

VI.

"Then on we pressed once more!
My horse, elated at the peril fled,
Snorting and frightened at the war o'erhead,
Flew as with wings of Pegasus endowed,
Until, revealed by lightning-rifted cloud,
A wood rose dark before.
In blank dismay I drew a sudden rein,
Glanced back along the level, treach'rous plain
With such dire danger but so lately crossed,
Then forward at the forest, tempest-tossed
And lit with ghastly light.
A solid wall of boundless height it rose,

All human entrance seeming to oppose;
While in its dark recesses startled owls,
Joining to tempest din unearthly howls,
Made hideous the night.
Slow sank my heart in depths of dark despair.
From quicksand's peril, and from robber's snare
I'd but escaped new obstacles to meet;
Danger before, behind, beneath my feet,
And raging overhead.
My way was lost, I realized too well!
The greenwood path I chose as darkness fell,
Had led far from the goal I sought to gain;
Upon my face cold beat the sleety rain;
And while, with stately tread,
The coursers of the storm marched on their track,
Caparisoned with trappings gold and black;
While 'heaven's artillery' still louder boomed,
And Night in arms of light electric swooned,

I sat, with loosened rein,
Despairing at the hour's untoward fate,
Uncertain what new perils might await,
Irresolute what course to now pursue—
Or back or forward pressing to my view
Seemed equally in vain.
Across the moor did I my steps retrace,
The past hour's dangers I'd again to face,
With little hope of striking at the last
The greenwood pathway I that eve had passed;
While on the other hand,
To onward press was but to meet, perchance,
New perils which the tempest would enhance;
While every forward step yet farther past
The point I wished to compass, led me fast.
Thus did I, halting, stand
Awhile in dire perplexity, despair;
With garments drenched, and dripping beard and hair.

VII.

"At length I desp'rate grew.
'Twas death to cross the leechy, rain-soaked moor;
I could encounter nothing worse before;
And then, it *might* be better than my fear;
To stand in idle hesitation here
Was folly, well I knew.
Resolved whate'er befell to forward ride—
Whatever danger that black wall might hide—
I onward spurred; but to my sharp dismay
My horse refused the rowels to obey.
He'd plunge, and snort, and rear,
While seeming quite unmindful of my rein,
My coaxing tones, my hand upon his mane;
And when—a last resort—the lash I tried,
The poor beast wildly plunged from side to side,

Half mad with pain and fear.
Trembling in every limb, eyes flashing fire,
At every stroke he only reared the higher;
Fell on his haunches—wheeled—curvetted—
pranced,
But not a single onward step advanced,
Thŏugh coaxed, and lashed, and spurred.
Dismounting, I to *lead* him on essayed,
To soothe with words the fears he thus dis-
played;
But still I patted, petted, urged in vain;
For once oblivious did his ear remain
Unto his master's word.
This was a new perplexity indeed,
Unlooked for from my gentle, trusty steed.

VIII.

"Then came a sudden crash.
A lightning bolt from heav'n's heaviest gun
With aim unerring had its mission done,
And laid a mighty forest monarch low.
Across my pathway lay my blazing foe,
Its vivid, blood-red flash
Illumining the leafy wall before,
The nearer reaches of the dusky moor,
And painting, with its dashes red and clear,
Each feature of a scene as wild and drear
As fancy could suggest.
While still the pouring rain dashed fiercely down,
Attempting, but in vain, the flames to drown,
Which at each onslaught seemed to leap the higher,

Crowning with wreaths of lambent, glowing fire
Each king in scarlet dressed.
And still the pealing thunder roared and crashed;
The crinkling lights above each moment flashed,
In mock'ry laughing at the cruel work
Which plunged to heart of oak a flaming dirk;
And still through forest lone
The wind from frozen chambers of the north
With howl, and shriek, and moan dashed wildly forth,
And blew with mighty breath the flames again
Which leaped, and flashed, until with ruby rain
Each twig and leaflet shone;
While far beyond the confines of the light
Stretched boundless reaches of sepulchral night;
And deep in forest chambers hung with green,
Slept purple glooms, untouched by scarlet sheen,
Which gave the picture tone.

How weird, and wild, and grand the glowing
view,
My words are pow'rless to convey to you.

IX.

"Thus motionless I stood
With foot in stirrup, bridle in my hand,
And gazed upon the panorama grand,
Oblivious to all except the power
That held me spell-bound in this fearful hour,
In midst of fire and flood,
Unmindful that the night wore on apace,
Forgetful that in this deserted place—
My bearings lost, no place of shelter nigh,
A pathless wood before, and raging high
An autumn tempest wild—
I stood, alone but for my faithful steed.

Paying to none of these a moment's heed,
And recking only that before me spread
A scene of grandeur and of beauty dread
Which had my sense beguiled.—
And still the rain did battle with the fire;
The scarlet flames seemed ready to expire—
Anon in desperation upward leapt
To prove they were but feigning that they slept—
Then faltered and grew pale;
Now reeled and staggered, faint for want of air;
Then rallied from their swoon of dark despair,
And with assumption pitiful of life,
Renewed again the fierce unequal strife,
Though all to no avail.
Too strong the enemy they sought to' oppose.
Their doom was sealed—they yielded to their foes!

X.

"The rain was victor now.
But still as if, like one of ancient Rome,
Resolved to bravely die if death must come,
With one last effort, one expiring sigh,
The paling flames leaped grandly, proudly high,
And by their parting glow
Revealed to dazzled but rejoicing sight
An op'ning in the forest far to right;
An op'ning broad and clear, while overhead
The forest giants had their arms outspread
A leafy arch to form.
I into saddle sprang with one swift bound;
My horse obeyed the spur, and o'er the ground
Flew swiftly tow'rd the spot which seemed to me
A God-sent pathway to security,

To rest, and shelter warm.
Nor was I self-deceived—as this good chair
And glowing fire—(thanks to this lady fair,)
Most cheerily attest."—And with a smile
Whose sweetness might the proudest heart beguile,
And one admiring glance
Within the eyes whose varying light and shade
Such flatt'ring int'rest constantly betrayed
In all he said of that disastrous night
When every element did thus unite
To check his steed's advance,
He once again his easy pose assumes,
And speedily his narrative resumes:

THE STRANGER'S STORY CONTINUED.

I.

" ND so I onward rode.
The trees above me spread their
shelt'ring arms
And beckoned from the tempest's ruder charms
Which held me spell-bound on the open moor,
While untried dangers darkly loomed before,
And on my heels swift trode.
The path was well defined, and overspread
With fallen leaves on which my horse's tread
Fell hushed and soft as footfall on the floor
By webs from Persian loom spread richly o'er.
A small stream gently flowed

Beside my path, its tiny murmur lost
In thunder's roar, and groan of branches tossed
From side to side with rude resistless might
By spirits of the air which o'er the night
Held undisputed sway.
But now and then a bristly branch bent low,
And dashed across my face with stinging blow;
Or, hurled with force from tree-top's lofty height,
My good horse struck, which started with affright
And madly dashed away.
While overhead the elemental war
Still shot its angry missiles near and far.

II.

"For still the storm-king raved!
His chariot wheels still rumbled near and loud,
And echoed from each lowly bending cloud;
His courser's hoofs struck fire at every leap;
His herald's trumpets sounded long and deep;
And still his pennons waved
In lurid tints defiance to the foe,
Against a background black as Stygian flow.
The way at length grew rude and boulder-strewn;
For dying leaves, sharp pebbles thickly sown
My pathway roughly paved;
The branches lower grew, and lashed my face
With angry violence at every pace;
While now and then in stress of spiteful wrath
The boughs joined hands across my toilsome path

And swept me from my seat.
The fallen trees which barred the way so weird
With flying leap my horse in safety cleared;
But many a pitfall all unseen, unknown,
With treach'rous twigs and branches overstrewn,
Tripped up his wary feet.
But these were merely trifles when compared
Unto a fate from which we scarce were spared.

III.

"Undaunted on we pressed.
And as at length the way less toilsome grew,
And now and then the lightning's glare flashed thro'
The thinning tree tops erst so darkly dense,
The midnight blackness growing less intense,
In my despairing breast

Sweet Hope to joyous being sprang once more;
And when I saw an op'ning just before,
With naught between the belt of woodland
broad
Beset with perils—safely passed, thank God!—
And yonder low'ring sky,
Rejoiced to think the peril overpast,
A road to safety almost reached at last,
And glad the forest glooms to leave behind,
An unobstructed path once more to find,
Rode on with courage high.
But as, unmindful of the pouring rain,
Or tempest war, I spurred along the plain,
A sudden flash revealed a rocky ledge;
My steed's hoofs rang upon the very edge;
Another step, and down
To voiceless depths we had been swiftly hurled,
Nor you, fair lady, nor my little world
Had heard the tale I have essayed to tell,

Which, dull or stirring, you have listened well."
To his the eyes of brown
Eager with interest are lifted now,
While on the soft pale cheek, and regal brow,
From which his thrilling tale the bloom had chased,
A faint pink flush the pallor has replaced;
And with a smile more bright
Than flashing firelight's brilliant, changeful glow,
She answers him with tones as sweet as low:
"Nay, more than stirring, sir, your story's been.
Almost I saw the lightning's lurid sheen
Which made your path alight,
And pointed dangers that your lone way crossed;
Almost I heard the groaning branches tossed
Like helpless saplings by the storm's rude might;
Almost I felt the thrill of dread and fright
With which upon the brow
Of that dark gulf you paused in sudden fear,

So vivid has your story been, and clear.
To tell, I pray you, sir, do not delay,
How fared you further on your per'lous way."
"Short space suffices now
My story to complete," the man replies,
While beams his brow, and smiles his lips and eyes.

IV.

"Adown the dizzy steep
For one dread moment horrified I gazed;
Far down the black abyss the lightning blazed
And then went out in deep Tartarean night;
While I, bewildered, on that fearful height
Sat still in horror deep.
By tightened rein and quick commanding tone,
My trusty horse upon his haunches thrown

Stood motionless, obedient to the rein
The which I dared not slacken, till again
The friendly lightning's flash
Had shown me where his feet might safely rest.
A leaden weight seemed pressing on my breast;
The blood within my veins had ceased to stir
So full of horror dire the moments were,
While far beneath the crash
Of rolling thunder echoed deep and long.
My brain is cool, my nerves are sound and strong,
But those few moments on that dang'rous height,
The while I waited for the flashing light
To show where safety lay,
Seemed to my tortured heart a rounded year.
Then first I learned to know what men call fear.
I'd looked ere this upon the face of Death
With heart undaunted, and unbated breath,
And held the foe at bay;
But it is one thing, lady fair, to face

The King of Terrors, even, in a place
Where you may battle with him, hand to hand,
Another, on a brink like this to stand
While at your very feet
A black abyss of unknown depth yawns wide,
The which a single step to either side
Adown may horse and rider quickly dash,
Your only hope the lightning's friendly flash,
So fitful and so fleet."
"Such threat'ning doom the stoutest heart might quail,"
The lady says with trembling lips and pale.

V.

"With radiance divine
At last it came—a vivid chain of light
Upon a sky more black than Egypt's night;"

With answ'ring smile he hastens to resume.
"Nor was I slow to 'scape the frightful doom
Which almost had been mine.
One shudd'ring glance adown the deep abyss
Through which the forkèd lightning seemed to hiss;
One agonizing search for safety's path,
While far above me burst the thunder's wrath,
And far beneath my feet
The angry sound reverberated long,
From rocky chasms rising hoarse and strong,
Caught up, thrown back, again, and yet again,
And then I loosed once more my tightened rein,
And joyfully and fleet
My noble steed dashed onward like the wind,
Leaving the yawning chasm far behind.

VI.

"My tale is almost done.
For many a mile along the open plain
I rode at random, without drawing rein;
Regardless of the storm still swelling hot;
Whither my steps were tending knowing not,
Nor recking, so that on
They swiftly bore me from the dang'rous height
Which had for me the record of the night
So nearly closed. But on my list'ning ear,
Alert for aught that should of danger near
A timely warning sound,
At last a noise of rushing water fell,
Faintly distinct from thunder's roar and swell,
From sweep of wind, or rain drop's rapid beat
Falling upon me in an icy sheet.
In vain I glanced around,

Drew rein and listened to the rush and fall
Of unseen water; like a fun'ral pall,
So close in many a clinging, opaque fold
The darkness wrapped me round—so constant rolled
The thunder's sullen boom—
So clear and strong the echoes o'er and o'er
Repeated both the tempest's heavy roar
And sound of cataract, I could not tell
Or at my side or in my path it fell,
Or yet how dire the doom
Which now was threat'ning. List'ning thus in vain,
I paused a moment only—loosed my rein,
And trusting to my brave, sure-footed steed,
And Him whose care surrounds us in our need,
I cautiously rode on.
Straight forward—neither to the left or right

His footsteps swerved, as on through blackest night
He slowly bore me, while distincter yet
Above the tempest's roar, the rush and fret
Of tossing water, down
From unknown heights impetuously flung,
Was borne unto my ear.—The voice that sung
In sweetest silv'ry notes to th' summer breeze,
Which murmured fondest thoughts to th' o'er-bending trees,
Now hoarse with pain and wrath,
Lashed into fury by the tempest's breath,
Shouted defiance to the storm, and death
To the benighted trav'ller should he dare
Attempt to stem its angry current there.
Along the dang'rous path
My horse's hoofs paced cautiously and slow,
Awhile—but paused abruptly as the flow
Of angry waves his dripping fetlocks swept.

I knew not why he stopped—knew naught except
That danger lay ahead.
Dismounting cautiously, in hope to learn
What peril menaced now, and to discern
Where safety lay, full ankle deep my feet
Splashed in the waves whose throbbing, surging beat
Showed that the torrent's bed
Lay close beside, beneath, perchance before,
The while a muffled but terrific roar
Betrayed how near a raging cat'ract fell.
To cross just here was death, I knew too well.
So, motionless with dread,
As once before, I waited for a ray
Of heav'n's electric light to point the way.

VII.

"How gracious and how kind
Is He who in His strong, all pow'rful hand
The elements doth hold! Who may command,
And even ocean's surges must obey!
His breath the storm-cloud speeds upon its way;
His grasp controls the wind—
The winds! we know not whence they come, or go;
Perchance they're God's own breath, pulsating slow
Or quick, as throbs His great, all-loving heart,
Whose veins run through the world, life to impart.
One breath born of His *might*
And quick the feeble spark of life goes out
In night and darkness! yet how sweet about

Our brows the summer breezes play, and soft
As kisses pressed by loving lips so oft!
To Him the day and night
Are subject. Willed He thus, no more the sun
Should rise to glad us; nor when day is done
Should it withdraw its burning, dazzling light
And give to us the cool and dew of night;
And yet the dark and light
Succeed each other with their varying charm;
The day with sunlight brilliant is, and warm;
Upon our midnight shines the moon from far;
He gives the mariner a polar star
By which to steer his barque
Across the pathless waves of mighty seas,
From northern snows to sunny southern leas;
And when no more the moon gleams pale from far,
When tempest clouds obscure the northern star,

And nights are wild and dark,
His hand directs the fearful lightning's play,
To lead the 'wildered trav'ller on his way.

VIII.

"For this I waited long.
The storm had lulled—to gather added force;
The rain more gently fell; and low and hoarse
The distant murmur of the thunder swelled,
As hither, thither, by mad winds impelled
The clouds were born along.
The lightning flashed, but fitfully and pale,
And shed no radiance in the lonely vale
Where on the torrent's brink I waiting stood.
The moon shone softly on a distant wood,
Her pale and lovely face
One moment showing through an inky cloud

Which parting slightly her sweet gaze allowed,
But on my path she sent no kindly gleam,
And not one ray lit up the rushing stream
By which I paused. The place
Still lay enshrouded in the deepest gloom.
The time seemed long. The rift through which the moon
Showed her sweet face I watched with eagerness,
Hoping 'gainst hope to see the clouds grow less
Intensely black and dense,
The rift enlarge and show enough of blue
My half-despairing heart to reimbue
With fast-dissolving courage. But in vain
Were all my hopes. The clouds soon closed again;
The darkness more intense,
If that were possible, each moment grew;
The wind, reviving, fierce and fiercer blew;
The thunder rumbled nearer and more loud,

As rapidly the dark, low-bending cloud
The zenith shrouded o'er.
And then there came a brilliant flash of light,
And as it paled, another, still more bright;
The whole meridian seemed to be aflame;
And as the parted clouds together came
The crash, and roll, and roar,
Reverberating rocky cliffs among,
And back from lofty mounts in echoes flung,
Was something grander than my words can tell.
The double flash, too, had illumined well
The whole surrounding scene.
Before me, from a dizzy altitude
Where bristling rocks their jagged points obtrude,
A sheet of snow-white water foaming dashed;
The silver spray like myriad diamonds flashed
In that electric sheen,
As in a rocky basin wide and deep,

The foaming torrent in a last mad leap,
With hoarse deep roar fell, almost at my feet,
Laving my horse's limbs with fretting beat,
As on the basin's edge
Full ankle deep we stood, my steed and I,
In th' foaming flood. All this my eager eye
In briefest space took in, while by the light
Of that first flash the whole wild scene was bright.
A lofty, ragged ledge
Precipitously rose before my face,
Rifted midway to give the torrent place;
It stretched before me like a massive wall
Far to the right; would I proceed at all
'Twas plain through rocks and sedge
My course lay, round the mountain's base, in hope
Beyond a smoother, safer path might ope.

IX.

"This, you will understand,
The second flash which lit the gloom revealed.
Again I mounted; to the right I wheeled;
And slowly o'er the rocks which paved my way
Proceeded on my course. As bright as day
The scene, so wildly grand,
Was by the friendly lightning often made;
Thus with each point so brilliantly displayed
I could not lose my way. At length before
I saw the ledge was sloping more and more
Toward the level ground.
And so ere long before me spread again
A sweep of gently undulating plain;
And to my joy I struck a well trod road
Which slowly led to higher land, where flowed

The stream erewhile I found
Dashing so madly through the rocky cleft,
And down the lofty ledge I late had left.

X.

"So hope revived once more!
Not since the night so dark and wild became,
With thunder resonant and light aflame,
Had I a travelled road like this one found;
And as my steed's hoofs sounded on the ground
Like footfalls on a floor
Of tesselated marble, or as rang
O'er rocky road, and echoing bridge, the clang
Of hurrying hoofs upon that fearful night
When Tam O'Shanter took his famous flight
By witches swift pursued,
I dared to hope the night's disasters past,

And that this well-trod road would lead at last
To human habitations, there to find
Rest for my wearied frame and o'erwrought mind
In Death's similitude
Sweet Sleep's most blest oblivion. But not yet
Was safety reached, or the last peril met."

XI.

A moment pausing there,
The lady says: "Forgive me, sir, I pray,
That I, unmindful of the toilsome way
By which you have been led this dismal night,
And of a hostess' part forgetful quite,
Have not forborne to spare
Until repose your sore fatigue had cured,
And Sleep refreshment to your mind assured,

Your kind recital of the night's events,
The which I've heard with int'rest so intense.
And that indeed must be
For my discourtesy in that respect
My sole excuse. Such culpable neglect
Forgive, I beg; and till the morning light
Defer the farther hist'ry of the night." . . .
"Nay, lady," answers he,
While beaming smiles light up his fine dark face,
"No cause for self-reproach has she whose grace
Has granted to the houseless wanderer
Shelter and warmth, nor scrupled to confer
Still sweeter boon than these,
Her gentle presence both to charm and cheer.
More grateful far the rest afforded here
In easy chair, by glowing fire like this,
Than downiest couch could give. Nay, not remiss
In finest courtesies

Hast thou, fair lady, been. And naught to ask
Has he who finds it but a pleasant task
Thus to relate, with what poor skill he hath,
The many dangers that beset his path
Through hours of night and storm."
"Thanks for the kindness that would seek to spare
Reproach so well deserved. Not thus my care
And hospitality is often shown
To those I welcome to my home so lone;"
With blushes swift and warm
The gentle lady hastens to reply.
"So wild the night, so terrified was I
With many nameless fears, so very sad
And desolate I felt, I was too glad
Above the tempest's roar
To hear the beat of horse's hoofs without—
When I had overcome the first wild doubt

Which stilled my heart's wild throbbing for a
space,
Lest those were phantom feet whose rapid pace
Approached my lonely door.
Not long I cherished such a foolish fear.
Naught could be worse, I felt, on night so drear
Than solitude like mine. Thus you'll believe
I hailed with joy aught that should bring reprieve;
And that your presence here
Is unto me a boon of no less worth
Than is to you the comfort of my hearth." . . .
Pleased at the lady's gentle graciousness,
And for her loneliness perplexed to guess
What reason can appear,
He sits a moment silent, with his eyes
Fixed on the crackling fire, and then replies:
"Your words embolden me to ask of you
What otherwise I'd not presumed to do—
Why lonely and alone

I find you, lady, on so wild a night;
You who should be the centre and the light
Of home's endearing circle. Why each room
From which the voice of mirth should chase the gloom
All silent seems, and lone.
If I presume, forgiveness grant, I pray,
Nor fail to censure in whatever way
Your kindness deems most fit." She smiles at this,
And lifting archly two brown eyes to his
With playful unreserve—
"Nay, till the tale of this adventurous night
Is finished," says she, "I reserve the right
Your most presumptuous wish to gratify,
Or give the censure which, as you imply,
Your boldness would deserve."
He bends his head with mock submissiveness.
"Your ladyship's command is law!" he says.

XII.

He hastens to resume :
"The tale of this adventurous night, which you
Do me the honor thus to listen to
With kindest interest, may soon be told :
Along the well-made road beside which rolled
The turbid, swollen flume,
My horse dashed swiftly for a little space,
And then abruptly checked his rapid pace,
And in another moment stood quite still.
I urged him to advance in vain. His will
Was stronger than my own ;
But taught by dangers past from which my steed
Had saved me, in this self-same way, indeed,
I ceased to urge him on, though somewhat vexed
To be detained, as well as much perplexed.
What obstacle unknown

Was now across the path that seemed so smooth
'Twas quite impossible to guess. In sooth,
I doubted much if 'twas not his conceit
Alone, that thus had stayed his wary feet.
My own was greater yet,
As was by the event distinctly shown,
The which his fine intelligence made known.
Thus, undecided on my further course,
And half impatient at my faithful horse,
Inclined to quite forget
How much I owed to his sagacity,
I sat in silence, while I longed to see
The lightning's flash the scene around illume,
And show what peril, hidden by the gloom,
Was lurking just ahead.
But faster than had been my own swift pace
The heavy clouds above had changed their place
And drifted somewhat farther east. But soon
The lighter clouds were rifted, and the moon

Looked brightly forth instead;
And by her friendly, and most welcome beam,
I saw that just before the swollen stream
Flowed noisily across my very path.
I guessed how great the current's force and wrath,
How fierce and swift its pace,
When I perceived on either side the road
Huge stone abuttments reared, which plainly showed
A bridge had once the rushing streamlet spanned.
I doubted not the torrent's mighty hand
Had torn it from its place;
I doubted not that on the further side
The well-broke road stretched onward, smooth and wide;
I doubted not it led to what each hour
I longed and hoped for with intenser power—

A shelter from the storm.
But should I trust to such a surging tide
My good steed's strength, already sorely tried?
Or should I seek another path to find,
And leave the road and roaring brook behind?
The hope was too forlorn.
With one brief prayer to Him who rules the wave,
One kindly word to Selim, good and brave,
I urged him to attempt the dang'rous ford.
He first resisted, then obeyed my word
And plunged within the stream.
No *ford* was this! the waters bubbled high
And fierce around us; rushing madly by
And half submerging us, as, struggling on,
The furious current almost bore us down.
Dark did the prospect seem
Of ever reaching through that angry tide
The goal I sought—the mystic other side.

XIII.

"Thus fiercely buffeted—
One moment yielding to the current strong
In sheer fatigue, and swiftly borne along,
How far adown the stream I dared not think—
Then as hope died, and faith began to shrink,
And craven courage fled,
The strife renewing, bending all his strength
Against the surging tide, until at length
The longed-for shore he almost would attain,
To be swept downward by the stream again.
His strength was spent, I knew;
In many a way ere this so sorely tried,
What wonder 'gainst it such a furious tide
Had soon prevailed! I petted, coaxed, and cheered;
But utterly exhausted he appeared.

I knew not what to do.
I thought of home, and of my mother sweet—
How she would list to hear my tardy feet,
And sicken o'er and o'er with hope deferred,
As moons should wax and wane and bring no word
Of me, her absent son.
I pictured how her cheek would pale with grief;
How e'en the Healer, Time, but slight relief
Would bring her loving, sorely-stricken heart;
Knew at my name the burning tears would start
In years not yet begun.
My father too—I did not him forget
In that sore hour—I knew that heavier yet
Than all the sorrows of the years long fled,
This blow would fall upon his aging head.
And then I thought of one
In no degree less dear than these, whose name
Had blent with every dream of future fame

Through all the years of my maturer life,
An impetus affording in the strife
For honors to be won.
The strife was finished now, and fame would seem,
To' have been the 'baseless fabric of a dream.'

XIV.

"And thus in sharp contrast,
And swifter than my words suffice to name,
Hopes, memories, regrets, together came,
Chasing each other through my mind's domain,
And crowding on my half-bewildered brain—
The future and the past
Inextricably mingled in my thought,
Till what was truth, what fancy, I had sought
In vain to demonstrate; and through it all

The mem'ry of that cruel waterfall
Dashing so mad and fast
Adown its dizzy ledge of ragged stone,
Was surging like a solemn undertone
That swells and sobs all through a dirge of death.
This while my faithful Selim's panting breath
His deep exhaustion showed;
While faith and courage died, and hope was lost
In stern despair; while buffeted and tost
By every wave, we drifted down the flume
To what it seemed must be our certain doom.
A chill of horror flowed
Through every pulse at thought of death like that:
Dashed helpless down that fearful cataract
From rock to rock, a hundred feet or more—
Our requiem the water's sullen roar,
Our shrouds the filmy mist,
The foaming pool below a fitting tomb

To hold the victims of so sad a doom.
At thought of this my heart grew strangely chill;
My pulse throbbed hard, and acting on my will
Aroused me to resist.
Should I succumb to Fate's tyrannic sway
Without one other desp'rate struggle? *Nay!*

XV.

"I gathered in my hand
The bridle—which from my despairing clasp
Had almost slipped—with firm and steady grasp;
I struck my horse a sharp and sudden blow,
And sternly bade him bear me on; and lo,
Not useless my command.
He rallied all of his remaining force,
And struck out bravely for the shore, his course
Directed by my hand upon his rein.

I cheered him constantly, until again
He almost reached the land;
And then his energy began to fail,
And my faint hopes to sicken and grow pale;
Too well I knew of rest the fearful cost
To him and to myself—that to be lost
Was what delay meant now.
With voice and rein I kept him to the strain;
And when he yielded to the tide again
I merciless became—my sole resource—
With whip and spur I urged him on his course;
No pause did I allow,
For now the current ran less swift and strong—
The shore was near—I knew he must ere long
A footing find the shallow waves below,
Where its low banks the waters overflow.
Thus forcing an advance,
Soon on the sandy bed foothold was gained;
But though to keep it every nerve he strained,

Sometimes too strong the current proved e'en yet
For his exhausted strength; but bravely met
Was every new mischance;
Quick struggling to his feet renewed the strife
As though he knew the stake to be his life;
And when at last he reached the blessed land,
So great was his fatigue he scarce could stand.
From out the hungry wave
With one last effort of expiring strength
He dragged his trembling limbs, and stood at length
Shiv'ring and panting on the yielding sand.
As I dismounted, and with voice and hand
Cheer and caresses gave,
He 'gainst my shoulder leaned his weary head—
His sole response to the kind words I said.

XVI.

"Of rest how sore his need!
I stood beside him, wearied, stiff, and lame,
Until his lab'ring breath more gently came,
And he his strength could partially regain;
Then mounting, up the stream I turned again
And urged him to proceed;
For far below the point I hoped to reach
We'd landed, on a strip of sandy beach,
While up the flume a hundred rods or more,
The good road stretching from the rocky shore
I doubted not must lead
To town or city, hamlet, hall, or cot—
Which it might be to me it mattered not,
So that a shelter there I might obtain
From sweep of boist'rous wind and sleety rain.

The veriest hut had seemed
A palace to the shiv'ring wretch, for hours
The sport and victim of those unseen powers
Which rule the elements with mighty sway,
And guide and speed the storm-cloud on its way.
The moon which softly beamed
At intervals across my wat'ry path,
Had hid her face; the clouds had gathered wrath
And broke once more in fury o'er my head;
The way was rough—o'er sharp-cut boulders led,
And tedious shifting sand.
'Twas plain we'd drifted farther than I thought;
And I began to fear the road I sought
Existed only in my fancy wild,
Long ere I reached it—that the stones high piled
Upon the farther strand
In solid masonry were but a myth—
A phantom built in stone—a monolith

Which marked some ancient deed—the bridge a dream,
And nothing real save that furious stream
Whose current fierce and cold
Had almost swept me to that unknown sea
Which *we* call Death—God, Immortality.
But suddenly before my face upreared,
A high embankment, sand and rock, appeared;
And there in outlines bold
The empty piers before my vision came,
Illumined by a flash of lambent flame,
My friend unfailing. Up the rocky slope
I spurred, while in my heart sweet, buoyant Hope
Held joyous carnival.
The top was reached—the longed-for road was found.
Beneath our feet was firm and flinty ground;
Before us stretched a straight, well-trodden path;

No longer did the tempest's stormy wrath
My joyful heart appall;
I scarcely felt the cutting, stinging pain
When on my face fast beat the icy rain;
I scarcely heard the thunder's sullen roar,
For to my heart Hope whispered o'er and o'er
Rest, shelter now is nigh.
An hour, or more, or less, had swiftly sped.
The road grew broader, harder; while o'erhead
Great trees bent low a shelter to afford
The wretched trav'ller from the storm that roared
So fiercely, madly high.
At equal distance placed on either side
The graded road, I fancied they implied
The near proximity of human homes.
And so it proved. Ere long on tow'rs and domes
The blazing lightning glowed.

A goodly sight to traveller belate—
For hours the victim of an adverse fate—
This mansion towering in pride and state
The lofty trees above—the massive gate—
The sweep of drive that showed
Beyond it, leading to the mansion fair.
I tried the lodge, but found no porter there;
I passed the gate which closed with sullen clang—
On well-kept drive my steed's hoofs echoing rang
As onward swift I rode.
The door was reached! Dismounting, I made bold
To knock and enter! The result behold!

XVII.

"My story is complete!
However weakly told, you've listened well.
I've marked your bosom's agitated swell;
The color on your fair cheek come and go;
And in your eyes the opalescent glow
So changeful and so sweet,
Which spoke more eloquently than you knew,
The sympathy that my disasters drew
From your too kindly heart;—which, thus displayed,
Beguiled me on until I fear I made
My story far too long.
If so, forgive! An interest so great
More flatt'ring is than words can indicate.
But now the 'tale of this adventurous night'
Is finished, my presumption pray requite

With censure just and strong,
Or in the gentle kindness of your heart,
The story of your solitude impart
To him who craves it out of int'rest kind,
And sympathy for one he grieves to find
So lone on night like this.
Though my desert is small, I leave my fate
In your fair hands, dear lady, and await
My sentence from your lips; in this secure,
From one so kind and gentle, good and pure,
It cannot be amiss."
"'Tis true," she answers with a saucy smile,
"That your desert is small: but to beguile
The passing hours of this distressful night,
I shall your most presumptuous wish requite
By making the attempt
To tell you something of the causes strange
That have conspired together thus to change
My home from one of happiness and cheer

To what you find it—empty, lone, and drear."
Her face grows sad, intent,
As she with many a pang, and many a sigh,
Relates the story of the days gone by.

THE LADY'S STORY.

I.

"THE storm has lulled at last—
For see! the lightning's flash no more gleams blue,
Each distant tree-top bringing clear to view;
And hark! no more the thunder's angry din
Awakes the echoes empty rooms within;
No more the wind sweeps past
With madness in its loud and boist'rous tone;
But in my life so desolate and lone,
So destitute of home's delights and cheer,
So rifled of the friends my heart held dear,
The storm still rages wild.

My life is empty as the rooms above,
And cruel Death has gathered all I love,
And left me, as you see, alone and sad.
My mother died—a sweeter none e'er had—
When I was but a child.
I just remember her sweet face and smile,
The deep, deep love, the playful, tender wile
With which she taught me all a babe could learn;
I just recall how I, in sweet return,
Was wont her cheeks to press
With baby fingers scarce more soft or white
Than hers, and lisp with infantile delight
The holy words she taught my lips to say,
Then 'gainst her own to lay my cheek, and pray
'Dear God, my mamma bless!'
I just remember when my prayer was said,
And I was ready for my tiny bed,
The soft, soft kisses showered on my face,
The warmth and tenderness of her embrace,

The murmured words and fond;
How o'er her pleasant task she lingered long,
With many a pretty tale or tender song
Her darling soothing to a babe's sweet rest,
So gently pillowed on her loving breast;
How quickly she'd respond
With passionate caress, or tender smile,
To every innocent and artless wile;
And how, as loath to yield to sleep's repose
I would my drowsy eyelids still unclose
To look upon her face,
Her hand would press my soft cheek closer still,
With deepest love her sweet blue eyes would fill,
And murm'ring words more tender than her song,
She'd bend her cheek to mine and hold me long
In close and fond embrace;
And so I'd drift away to infant sleep;
And so these loving mem'ries still I keep;

And though 'tis long since she, my mother, died,
Though many a change my young, sad heart has
tried,
And years have left their trace
Upon the dimpled cheeks and infant brow
She loved so well, I long for her e'en now."

II.

Although with int'rest keen
The stranger lists each sadly spoken word,
While all his heart to sympathy is stirred,
A swift amusèd smile lights up his eyes
As thus she speaks and pauses.—With surprise
'Tis by the lady seen.
She looks at him with grave, enquiring face,
And quickly he responds with courtly grace:
"Forgive me for the smile to you may seem

To mock a daughter's longing so supreme
For one so early dead.
'Tis sad to be thus lonely and bereft,
And motherless in infancy be left;
I with you for your loved and lost would grieve;
And deeply does my heart respond, believe,
To all that you have said.
I *smiled* to think upon your lovely face
How *many* years had left their fatal trace;
How vainly would your mother, could she now
Look on her daughter's velvet cheek and brow
(*So* changed by grief and *time*),
Seek for the semblance of the darling child
She loved so well. For this alone I smiled,
For this I would your pardon humbly crave."
"I scarcely know how for offence so grave
You hope for grace of mine—
How you my pardon dare expect to gain
For ridicule so palpable and plain."—

This to his impudence her stern reply;
But her soft laugh, and smiling, sparkling eye
Shows all her wrath assumed.
"Not thus," she adds, "did I your story list,
Or so your modest narrative assist."
"Nay," he responds with grave, admiring mien,
"Of listeners you've truly proved the queen;
And I who have presumed
To tire you with a story of such length,
Then make to you so base return, the strength
Of your resentment well deserve to know,
Which in your kindness you forbear to show.
Again with deepest shame
I beg you will my prayer for pardon hear—
Believe my penitence is most sincere
For smile, and thought, both so inopportune,
And granting this your story please resume."
"Reward then you would claim,

As well as pardon!" she returns with smiles,
His heart ensnaring by her modest wiles.

III.

"Of her who loved me well,"
The lady now continues, "little more
Than I have told you, mem'ry holds in store.
I faintly recollect how to her breast
With tears and anguished sobs I once was pressed,
And felt my bosom swell
With sympathetic sorrow at her pain;
And how to soothe her grief I tried in vain
With every art a baby's love invents,—
Which seemed instead to make it more intense.
The cause I can't explain.
If it was grief to feel the grave so near—

To leave the child than her own life more dear,
To grow to womanhood without the care
Of mother-love to guard from worldly snare;
Or if for such deep pain
A cause there was with which her child beloved
Had naught to do, I never fully proved.
I know she was not happy as a wife,
And that her innocent and pure young life
Was shadowed by a cloud
Which turned her gladness into bitter grief,
And made the story of her life so brief.
I've studied long her portrait hanging now
Where then it hung, and cannot but allow
The face, if sweet, is proud.
And I have gathered from the little learned
Of her young life, that he she loved had turned
To her when wounded by another's scorn,
And offered her a heart still scarred and torn—
A pitiful exchange

For one so fresh, so loving, and so true!
That when at last the bitter truth she knew,
She turned from him with all a woman's pride,
And wounded, stricken to the heart, she died.
It would not then be strange
If for the anguish which I recollect,
This was the primal cause—as I suspect."

IV.

"Your story's passing sad!"
The stranger says, with slightly moistened eyes.
The lady faintly smiles as she replies;
"Yes! it is sad to think to heart so fond
His whose it was with love could not respond;
A life so pure and glad,
So full of promise in its morning hours
Should thus have faded like frost-blighted flowers.

But I believe the heavy cloud had passed,
And she been happy in his love at last,
But for her pride and scorn.
I know my father truly grieved above
The still, cold form of her he vowed to love;
I recollect the bitter tears he shed
Beside our beautiful and early dead,
With me, his earliest born,
Clasped closely to his wildly throbbing heart.
How much regret, remorse, in this had part
I was of course too young to estimate.
I know I thought his sorrow very great,
And sobbing, closer crept
Within the arms whose hold was fond and kind.
I still remember when for her I pined,
And why she came not scarce could understand,
How sad his face, and gentle was the hand
That dried the tears I wept;
How patiently he put aside his book,

How tenderly and cheerfully he took
His child upon his knee, and sought to find
Diversion for her sorr'wing heart and mind.
I think he scarcely knew
How much he loved my mother, till her loss:
Until the sense of it had swept across
His lonely heart, and he had come to miss
Her gentle smile and word, the timid kiss,
The face so sweet and true;
Until my longing for her made him feel
How sad a thing it was that death should steal
A mother from her tender infant child,
Who, though so young, could scarce be reconciled
To miss her love and care.
I think he knew that he had spoiled her life;
That she had not been happy as his wife;
And ever felt a deep and sore regret
That in his selfish blindness he had let
His wife, so young, so fair,

Turn from him in her pride and bitter pain
Without one mighty effort to retain
Her love and trust. I've often seen him gaze
With deepest sadness on her pictured face,
Then turn away with sighs,
And pace the room with head bent on his breast,
And face so full of pain and sad unrest
My heart ached for him. But, though far from cold,
His nature was reserved. He never told
In words the grief that lies
In hearts like his too deep for careless speech,
And that not e'en a daughter's love could reach."

V.

"And so you only guessed
The story of your father's wedded life,

And his estrangement from his fair young wife?"
"Nay—I have gathered much from trifles slight,
Which, wove together, made a chain of light.
I have surmised the rest—
The grief my father felt, and sad regret
For her whose love with coldness had been met.
But from some letters to her by a friend
She loved and trusted, in that sad time penned,
I came to understand
There was a sorrow in her life so deep
It made her whole heart sore; nor could I keep
The subject from my thoughts till I had turned
The last page of her journal, and had learned
My father's was the hand
That struck the brightness from her glad young heart.
But even then I only learned in part
The cause of all, for she was prudent too,
And scarcely more than hinted it all through.

But it was sad indeed
To read the close-writ pages, and discern
The glory of the music slowly turn
To saddest minor strains, until it passed
To a pathetic wail of pain at last.
The words I scarce could read
For the fast-dropping tears that stained the page,
So did they every sympathy engage.

VI.

"To make my chain complete
I gained some links from yet another source,
Which gave the half-guessed story greater force:
My mother's sister to our lonely home
Kindly consented for a time to come—
A woman fair and sweet
As she we lost, and filled her empty place

As none beside could do. Her lovely face
Was sad, for she too was estranged
From him she loved; a shadow vague had changed
Their plighted love and trust
To bitterness; misunderstandings, born
Of pride, I do not doubt, far more than scorn,
Had severed hearts that for the other beat.
She cast him off—his ring tossed at his feet.
He picked it from the dust,
And turned and left her sad and sore at heart,
To only know thenceforth love's bitter part.
She kept her pride intact 'tis true, but oh,
She dearly paid for it in years of woe.
He left her, as I said,
And wedded one—in pique—he scarcely knew,
And never loved.—But proved the adage true,
'In haste to wed, at leisure to repent!'
Their married life in distant lands was spent—

For she, the wife, is dead;
And two years since he met his early love,
And they are wedded now, and blest above
All other lovers whether wed or not.
So they believe, at all events. *His* lot
At least, is blest indeed,
To have so sweet a woman for his wife.
God give to her a long and happy life
To compensate for all the painful past!
I'm thankful every day she's glad at last,
However great my need
Of her companionship and presence here.
And that my need *is* great to you is clear."

VII.

"Aye, great indeed!" he says,
With tones half tremulous from pity kind.

"My heart grows heavier momently to find
How lone and desolate is she whose grace
And gentle goodness, shining through a face
Of winning loveliness,
Fits her to be the centre of a home
Of warmth, and light, and joy, where she had known
But love and tend'rest care engird her round,
Shielding from all that could distress or wound."
"Thanks for your pity, sir,"
The lady answers, pleased and touched to hear
Such kindly words in tones that seem sincere.
"*So* 'lone and desolate' is she that e'en
A stranger's sympathy a pleasure keen
Can on her heart confer.
And naught than that more forcibly I know
My bitter need could have availed to show."
"Dear lady, e'en in your short life have you
Ne'er proved that sympathy more kind and true

A 'stranger's' heart may feel—
If haply strung to vibrate with your own—
Than that of one perchance you long have known,
And toward whom you in your grief might turn
To find how faint the spark divine doth burn,
How shallow and unreal
The sympathies which to your needs respond,
Where you had looked to find them deep and fond;
If so you readily will comprehend
That though in fact a stranger—yet a friend
In feeling for your lot—
My heart a sympathy both deep and true
In this your hour of need doth give to you;—
You who until this fateful night unknown,
Have by the cords of pity round me thrown—
Designedly or not—
In firm and friendly hold bound to your own

A heart which never faithless has been shown
To man or womankind.—Long years agone
I read in ancient book a tale of one
Who by an adverse fate
Blown hither, thither, through a world of care,
Cold, weary, hungry, homeless, in despair
Of human help or pity, saw before
Invitingly spread wide a massive door,
And as the hour grew late,
In his extremity so dire and sad
Of any promised shelter but too glad,
Crept through the open portal where he found
Books heaped in many a pile from marbled ground
To frescoed ceiling high;
While silent groups of readers sat before
Great oaken tables spread with papers o'er,
Or volumes huge whose heavy blazoned leaves
Crackled like trodden twigs on Autumn eves.

A vacant table nigh,
With empty leathern chair that stood beside,
The weary, shiv'ring wretch with joy espied,
And dropping in the chair's extended arms,
Gave up his starving soul to all the charms
That dwelt within the place:—
Light, warmth, and stillness; and—oh boon most rare!
Of food æsthetic what a plenteous share!
Such food as had to him been long denied—
Poor, cultured wretch, against a strong head tide
Rowing a losing race!
Forgotten were his stomach's cravings keen,
While for his mind such store of meat was seen
Spread bounteously and free on every hand;
And as he read, the warmth so soft and bland
His shiv'ring form crept round,
And wrapt him gently in its genial arms;

A hundred lights breathed low their drowsy
charms,
The very stillness deeper grew, unbroke
Save by the turning leaves which scarcely woke
The heavy air to sound;
And lower, lower drooped his weary head,
Till on the massive book from which he read,
In gentle rest it pillowed lay at last,
And Sleep had in her shackles bound him fast.
And as he slept, he dreamed!
The hour was late, the place had empty grown—
Thus dreamed he—till he seemed at length alone
Within the strange and silent room, so rich
In store of rare and costly books, o'er which
The softened lights still streamed.
And as he raised his eyes and glanced around
The great deserted hall, surprised he found
Long vistas open to his wond'ring gaze,

Deep lined with books, while near each lofty case
Vague shad'wy forms appeared,
To fix whose outlines he in vain essayed;
For as he gazed they seemed to dim and fade,
Each melting into each, with subtle change
Appearing, vanishing, until the strange
And shifting scene he feared
Was but the picture of an o'er-taxed brain
Disordered by a long and serious strain.
But, musing thus, he saw approaching him
An aged form from yonder alcove dim,
Where in a burnished grate
The fading embers of a fire were seen;
And as he nearer drew, his shad'wy mien,
The far-off, dim regard of pale blue eyes
That met his own, filled with a chill surprise
The man who seemed to wait
With fettered will, and slowly beating heart,

The strange unfoldings of the hour, his part
In which as yet he scarce could understand.
The old man nearer came—within his hand
A tome of pond'rous weight;
And as he turned the blazoned leaves he said,
In tones that seemed an echo from the dead:
'You wish your volume sir, no doubt! what name?'
And as no answer to the query came,
The sage repeated slow—
'What name? You wish your volume sir, no doubt,
Wherein your destiny is written out.
You're highly favored in the flesh to be
Permitted thus your Book of Life to see.
Those yonder, sir, you know
Are but the souls of them who've left in sleep
Their bodies, while they hither speed to peep
Within their books, their further fate to find.

When they to-morrow waken, in their mind
Some mem'ries faint and fair
Of what they read perchance may still remain,
But little vivid will their minds retain.
But you are here in body, and may peep
Within the books they visit but in sleep—
A privilege most rare!'
The young man, list'ning with wide open eyes,
Stood silent, in unbounded, chill surprise;
And then he saw, as at the shad'wy throng
He closer looked, that each one held a long
Thick volume strongly bound,
Wherein with eagerness he searched and read.
At last he spoke: 'Who then are you?' he said,
'And what this place?' The old man made reply:
This is the *Library of Fate*, and *I*
The master here. Look 'round—
From these the one that bears your own name take.

See that the cords you do not strain or break.
Aye, take it down ; none but yourself has power
To touch it, and you only at this hour.
When yonder clock strikes one
Your chance is gone. Be quick if you would read
What destiny awaits you.' Though indeed
With trembling hand, he took the volume down
Which bore his name upon the vellum brown;
And found, so finely spun
But for the old man's warning they had been
Scarce noted in the soft, uncertain sheen,
From out its pages many a tiny thread
To books above, below, around it led;
Some were of sombre hue—
Of rose, or gold, or silk were some, but all
To other volumes led or great or small.
'Whose books are those to which my own is bound?"

The young man asked, surprised at what he found.

'Those who have been with you
By Fate connected since your birth; the thread
That binds them to you marks the page,' he said,
'Whereon their destiny as linked with yours
Has been inscribed by Fate. Yon clock assures
The moments quickly speed;
If you would read, young man, read on, and fast,
Ere this auspicious hour be wholly past.'
Thus urged, he opened where a thread of gold
Marked two embellished pages; but behold,
When he essayed to read,
He found, chagrined, the characters were strange;
Small, crabbed, close, and quite beyond the range
Of his poor comprehension. As he gazed
Upon the baffling pages, vexed, amazed,
And disappointed sore,
The old man slowly said, 'Aye, I forget!

Your soul's eyes in the flesh are buried; yet
They can be opened—thus!' and with his thin
And shad'wy fingers touching them, therein
Seemed thrust, with anguished bore,
Hot needles, piercing through and through the ball.
He glanced upon the written page which all
Illumined seemed, and clear each crabbed stroke—
He stooped to read—then started—and awoke!
He had delayed too long.
The striking clock had broke the mystic spell,
And he in ign'rance still was forced to dwell.
This long-drawn tale which interrupts your own,
Dear lady, will to you, I trust, have shown
How fine, and yet how strong
The cords are spun which bind us each to each,
And that tonight we touch the one will reach
From out the pages of my Book of Life,

Straight to your own: with pleasant pictures
rife
The story written there
I pray may be; the thread a silken one,
Ne'er tangled till our tale of life is done.
Forgive this interruption long, I pray,
And so your story please resume straightway,
Assured I do not spare
The sympathy your sorry lot doth plead,
Though but a stranger till this hour indeed."

VIII.

"My story well can wait,"
The lady answers with a gentle smile,
"For one so thrilling as was yours." The while
She can but feel amused at what 'twas meant
To point, believing it mere sentiment

That 'twas the hand of Fate
Had linked their lives together, who till then
Were strangers, and would shortly be again;
Although 'twas made, by earnest tone and glance,
To seem the kindly, heart-felt utterance
Of one both true and kind.
She touched and grateful feels as well for what
Has but too rarely fallen to her lot
Of late to make it worthless to her seem—
Warm human sympathy, in whose soft gleam
The saddest heart must find
Some tender solace for its bitter woes.
And she too well the value of it knows—
Too ardently has longed through lonely hours
To feel once more its genial, soothing powers,
To spurn it e'en from one
Who but for one brief night her path doth cross,
To leave her then to solitude and loss.

But grateful as she is she yet forbears
Her gratitude to utter, and prepares
The story late begun
To further weave; so gath'ring as before
The broken threads, resumes her task once more.

IX.

"If I remember right
I said I gathered from another source
Some links that added to the strength and force
Of that slight chain e'en yet far from complete.
And these were gained from her, the woman sweet
Who as I said, made bright
The home by death left desolate and drear.
From her I learned that he, my father dear,
Had loved and wooed a maiden for his wife,

But spoke at last to find her heart and life
Were to another vowed.—
That other, one who shared his infant play—
His youthful couch—beside him day by day
To manhood growing, only to impart
The deadliest wound to his too faithful heart,
As earnest as 'twas proud.
I know not if 'twas wilful, that great wrong,
But lasting his resentment proved, and strong.
One stormy scene there was, and then the twain
Had parted—parted ne'er to meet again
This side Death's rushing tide.
One wedded her, the maiden both had loved,
Who of dissension such sad cause had proved;
And he, my father, in his pique and pain
Another wooed, and wooed her not in vain,
But won her for his bride.
You've seen how fatal to the wedded wife
Became the love which then was dear as life;

How soon the heart but caught in its rebound
Failed to respond to hers so sweet and sound;
And how she drooped and died,
Crushed by the knowledge that her love was vain,
And cold the breast whereon her head had lain.

X.

"I know not if I've said
My mother left a babe scarce six months old—
A lovely boy with curls of shining gold,
And eyes as blue as are the skies of June;—
Eyes like the mother's who had died too soon.
A boy who captive led
The hearts of all that looked upon his face—
So bright it was with sunny infant grace,
So brief the clouds that o'er it ever swept.

Of course within my father's heart he crept
Until his very life
Seemed wrapped about the person of his boy,
Who came to be almost his only joy—
Dearer by far than I, although to me
No tenderness was e'er denied; but *he*,
The image of the wife
So wronged, so early lost, was something more
Than child of his had ever been before.
He grew almost to manhood, gay, and bright,
Of every gathering the central light,
Of home the pride and joy;
And when he went away at last to gain
Proud academic honors, as 'twas plain
To partial love he could not fail to do,
It seemed that all our joy and brightness too
Went with the merry boy.
Nor was it seeming only; since that day
Joy from our home has hid her face away.

XI.

"Six months flew onward fast,
And brought our darling to his home again;
But with him came new pangs of fear and pain,
For he was changed, and seemed no more the bright
And merry boy in whom our proud delight
Had centred in the past.
Impatient, fretful, moody he had grown,
And talked sometimes with such a reckless tone
My father gazed at him in shocked surprise,
While tears of pain rose to his gentle eyes.
And yet he nothing said
Or in reproof, entreaty, or complaint;
Nor sought to fetter him by one restraint
Which should occasion give him to rebel
Against authority we knew too well

He had not learned to dread.
No doubt my father thought 'twas but the change
From home to college life had worked the strange
Unpleasant alteration in our boy;
That when his pow'rs should find a full employ
In reading more mature,
And he had grown accustomed to the rude
Transition from a home of quietude
To all the bustle of the college hall,
His healthy nature could not but recall
The teachings sound and pure
Which from his earliest infancy had been
With never ceasing care instilled therein;
That then it must itself assert once more,
And to his heart his wayward son restore.
I think my father erred.
I think it had been wiser to restrain

The wilful boy, with stong, firm hand; that vain
If then employed such efforts had not been,
And all that after-time of shame and sin
Perchance had ne'er occurred.
He erred through love! oh God, that it should be
That love like his such bitter fruit should see!"

XII.

By her too-painful past—
Which thus recalled rolls back upon her heart
With all the old-time bitterness and smart—
Quite overcome, her grieved and quiv'ring face
Within her hands she buries for a space,
While tears fall thick and fast
And drip in crystal drops her fingers through;
And on her lashes brown in diamond dew
Lie glittering as she looks up to see

The stranger's eyes all dim—ah, can it be?
Or is it but the mist
Though which she gazes at his visage kind?
She dries her own and looks again to find
She has not been deceived. "Forgive!" she says,
With faint, sad smile. "So recent are those days
I cannot yet resist
The burning tears that will unbidden fall
Whene'er their bitter record I recall."
The stranger answers not: too doubtful he
If his control of voice so perfect be
The lady 'twill assist
In her attempts composure to regain;
Yet feels assured his sympathy is plain.

XIII.

"Upon that sad, sad time,"
At last she slow resumes, "I will not dwell;
You know the story doubtless but too well,
For 'tis, alas, one far from new or strange—
From boyhood's innocence the rapid change
To folly, sin, and crime;
While they who hold him dear look on with pain,
Pow'rless to save, or even to restrain,
And when at last the downward race is run,
Lie prostrate in the dust, dragged down by one
Long held more dear than life;
While where the blame and where the fault hath lain,
'Tis ever difficult to ascertain.
No doubt my brother's training had not been

Such as should fit him the assaults of sin
To meet with manly strife.
Forth from the shelter of a pure home, thrown—
No safeguard save the teaching he had known—
Upon the tender mercies of a throng
Of reckless students, to whom right and wrong
Were empty words, I fear;
With nature gay and bright which led him on
To taste of pleasures he had known anon
As merely abstract, half unmeaning names,
While through his veins youth's hot blood surged in flames,
And in his willing ear
The tempter whispered constantly and loud,
Supported by the cheering, shouting crowd;—
What wonder that the pressure proved too strong
For his weak will; that he 'twixt right and wrong
The diff'rence failed to see,

Or seeing, was too weak to choose the right;
Too young to bear a man's part in the fight;
Too frail to keep his standard through the fray
And by his very daring win the day,
Made by the conquest free.
The very traits which rendered him so dear
To all who knew him, proved, I can but fear,
The strongest threads in that entangling snare
Which tripped and held him down, till in despair
He cut the cords of life
And perished in the net—but not alone,
For at that blow he snapped the strings of one
So linked with his it could but feel the stroke
Which smote the other till the life-cord broke.
The sacrificial knife
Its work, alas, accomplished but too well,
And red with heart's blood from his weak hand fell.

XIV.

"Short was the downward race!
A few brief months to mad indulgence given—
To list'ning to the tempter's voice till heaven
And home and honor vanished from his sight,
And then of revelry one mad, wild night
Which came and fled apace,
And left him in the garish light of day
To look with fevered eyes along the way
His reckless feet had led him, seeing there
The ruins of his wrecked youth, while each fair
And noble hope and aim
With which so gaily he the race began,
Lay strewn along the path down which he ran
So rapidly he had not paused to think
Of whither it might lead, till on the brink
Of ruin and of shame

He stood at last, with leisure to look back
Along the fatal, downward-shelving track,
To feel the crowd of debts he now must face,
And see before expulsion and disgrace.
The bitter, hateful sight
Of double shame was more than he could bear—
For he was proud if weak—and in despair
In whose deep blackness not one ray appeared
To light the darksome future he so feared,
Into the blacker night
Of everlasting death he reckless rushed,
And fears, remorse, and earthly pangs were hushed
In the eternal stillness of the tomb.
Can you imagine, sir, the weight of gloom
Which fell with crushing might
Upon our hearts when first the tidings came
Of our deep loss—and his—so—bitter shame?"

XV.

The lady's gentle tones
Grow tremulous and break to thus recall
The details of her wayward brother's fall;
And once again her aching, tear-filled eyes
Her slender fingers press, as she to rise
Above the grief she owns
Is too intense to always be repressed,
So bravely strives, lest he, her stranger guest,
Should be distressed at pain he cannot share,
Though kindly sympathy he may not spare.
Nor does she strive in vain.
Repeated griefs have taught her self-control,
And sorrows borne in silence strength of soul.
And so her tear-dimmed eyes are dried apace,
And she her story to resume essays:
"How mighty was the pain

With which we looked upon the still, dead face
Of him, our pride and darling, where the trace
Of reckless passion might be plainly seen—
Though death had given it a grace serene
Not all unlike the sweet
And gentle beauty of the lad we loved—
Saw on his temple fair the marks which proved
What agent had the tortured soul released,
You may conceive;—a grief that has not ceased
To throb with painful beat
Through every pulse of my afflicted heart,
Though speeding months have striven to impart
The solace which alone they can bestow.—
For time must lighten e'en the heaviest woe,
Though long indeed it be
Ere it can fully heal so sore a pain;
And then how deep the scar that must remain!
To him, the father, with whose very life
The boy's had been entwined, the fearful strife

Of shame and misery
With which he looked upon the ruined youth
Of one in whom he had the seeds of truth
And honor striven earnestly to sow,
With hope therefrom a harvest rich might grow,
Proved for his strength too great.
I stood beside him on that gloomy day
We were to lay our precious dead away,
While with such agony as love alone
Like his, when turned to sorrow, e'er has known,
He bared the face which late
Had been so bright with every boyish grace—
Gazed long—marked of the reckless life each trace—
Grew white and whiter still—then, with a groan
Of long-pent anguish, staggered and fell prone
Beside the dead whose fate
Left not one ray of hope to quench despair.

The heart which had ere this so much to bear
Had broken 'neath the strain that at it tore—
Beneath a chastisement so sad and sore.
The fearful work was done!
With anguish such as words can never tell,
I caught my stricken father as he fell,
And to his couch the silent form we bore;
But vain were all our efforts to restore
His reason to its throne;
He never spoke again; no prayers could save,
No efforts bring him back. Ere to the grave
Our boy was borne, the last faint spark had flown,
And I, bereft of all, was left alone—
O God, all, all alone!
Alone to bury from my sight away,
Of those I loved the precious, senseless clay!"

THE REVELATION.

I.

AS thus from lips grown white
And tremulous the last words faintly fall
In anguished murmurs, overwhelmed by all
The recollections of that fearful day,
The present moment seems to drift away,
While to her narrowed sight
Naught now remains except the bitter sense
Of what in passing was with such intense,
Such aggravating sorrow fraught to her,
That to recall it scarce less painful were;
And in her trembling palm

Again she bends her ashen grief-lined face
With pain too deep for tears, while for a space
The only sound that breaks the midnight hush
Is that of dropping coals, the roar and rush
Of winds not yet grown calm,
And sighs that break from her o'erburdened heart,
Still quiv'ring from the past's remembered smart;
While with new force, and all the old distress,
Back swells the sense of her deep loneliness
Without relief or balm,
Or even hope that in the future years
Some dear companionship for all her tears,
And loneliness, and sorrow, now so great,
Shall with its sweet rich fullness compensate,
And make these days distressed,
Viewed through the past's dissolving vista, seem
The strange dim changes of a troubled dream.
While on his part the stranger, deeply moved

By list'ning to a story which has proved
More sad than he had guessed,
With dimming eyes rests his averted gaze
Upon the flick'ring points of amber blaze
Which leap and glow within the well-filled grate,
And o'er the lady's light form radiate,
As with her hand still pressed
Before her face, she strives for self-control
Which, oft imperiled, yet has through the whole
Of her pathetic story—all the pained
Remembrances awakened—been maintained
With bravery sublime.
At least so thinks the stranger, as his gaze
Turns from the glint of leaping, golden blaze
Within the grate, and on the lady's form,
So slight, so frail, with admiration warm
Rests silent for a time,
While all his kindly heart is stirred anew
To think that one so womanly and true,

So tender, and so frail, though with a soul
Endowed with wondrous strength, and self-control,
And sweetness unsurpassed,
In her brief life should have endured so much
Of pain and trial, then be left to such
Intense and utter solitude as hers.
And gazing thus, and thinking thus, there stirs
A pity sweet and vast
Within his heart for her who sits so near,
Unwittingly appealing to each dear
And sacred sympathy his life has known,
By both the strength and weakness she has shown
Within the hour just past.
While with a man's most natural desire
To shelter, with the strength whose force and fire
Throbs consciously through every swelling vein,
What so needs shielding, scarce can he restrain
The impulse to enfold
Within his arms the shrinking, girlish form,

And with caresses fond, and words as warm,
Soothe and beguile her grief, and cause to leap
The light of smiles in eyes now shadowed deep.
But this were far too bold,
And though if 'twere his right it might be sweet
To both, it now his object would defeat,
Since 'twould alarm and add to the distress
Which he would fain assist her to repress.
The impulse thus controlled
Gives to his tone a subtle tenderness
When he at length the silence breaks, and says:
"Dear lady, sorrowful beyond compare
Has been the story which not e'en to spare
Yourself much present pain
You've not refused to kindly give to one
Who had no right to ask it, nor had done
Had he surmised what were the cost to you
Of such a task. For kindliness so true
He ever must remain

Sincerely grateful. But, while he'd confess
A wish he might that gratitude express
In such a manner as it should impart
Some grace of comfort to your sore tried heart,
He's sadly conscious, too,
The fact he was until this hour unknown
Makes it impossible it should be shown
In such a way as e'en a slight relief
To give you in so deep and stern a grief.
That it is not less true,
Less strong or sympathetic pray believe,
Though powerless soe'er to bring reprieve.
Sad as your story in its details strange
And pitiful has seemed to me, the change
It in your life has wrought
Is to my mind its very darkest phase.
Although I feel assured the future days,
While they can only mitigate your pain,
Must give you sweet companionships again,

Fond care, and loving thought,
To you the dearer for the present dearth
Of loving friends around your lonely hearth."

II.

The lady lifts her head,
And meeting thus the stranger's dusky eyes,
Wherein so much of tender feeling lies,
Smiles faintly, while the fluctuating rose
Back to her grief-paled cheek so richly flows
It deepens into red.
"I would your prophecy were true," she says.
"Scarce have I felt my utter loneliness
So deeply as to-night since that dark day
On which, alone, I laid my dead away,
And with a sinking heart,
A dread I could not master, from the tomb
Turned drearily, and to this empty room

Alone came back my sorry fate to face,
And banish as I might from this lone place
The ghosts which seemed to start
From every chair, from every window deep,
And from each statued alcove seemed to leap.
Ghosts of the loved and lost so lately here;
Ghosts of the many hopes, so bright, so dear,
Which made my girlhood glad;—
Hopes which, alas, if fair, so frail had proved,
The reckless hand of one I fondly loved
Had touched and shattered them, and naught remained
But brilliant fragments, marred and darkly stained
By mem'ries passing sad.
I never shall forget how when the gloom
Of twilight deepened in this silent room,
I shiv'ring stood before the fireless grate,
Of nothing conscious save the bitter fate

Which left me thus alone,
And all the nameless terrors it entailed,
The which to overcome I strove and failed,—
So utterly unstrung my nerves had been
By all the trials which my life within
The past few days had known.
I started foolishly at every sound,
While heart and pulse stood still, then with a bound
So mad and strong it made me faint and weak,
They fluttered on, while whiter grew my cheek
And wilder still my fears.
Each closing door without, each rattling blind,
With terrors new filled my disordered mind;
The plaintive night wind's every sigh and moan
Seemed but the echo of a human tone
To my excited ears;
The gloom seemed peopled with a thousand forms,

Unseen but felt, born of the hour's alarms;
Each smiling portrait seemed to me alive;
Each statue cold to move. I *could* not, strive
As wildly as I might,
Rise, as I said, above these terrors mad.
Nor was it strange; so various and sad
Had been the trials which had followed fast
Each on the other in the week just past,
Until on that wild night
Which closed a day of such extreme distress,
The ghosts of past and future seemed to press
So closely 'round me I could nothing feel
Except the fears I knew were so unreal
They would not bear the light.
The shocks repeated I had lately known
It seemed to me had almost overthrown
The reason whose appeals I could not hear
In those wild hours of superstitious fear
Which all so slowly passed.

The sense of my deep grief was vanquished quite
By those imagined phantoms of the night;
And yet they were to me most real too.
I scarce know how I lived the long hours through,
Retaining to the last
The consciousness I felt it were a boon
To lose awhile, although recovered soon."

III.

"'Twere marvellous indeed,"
The stranger answers, "that you should retain
Your reason quite intact 'neath such a strain.
It proves how much a young, strong heart can bear,
Though 'shrined within a form so frail and fair;
And how, when sore our need

God gives the strength required to bear us through
The trials we would shrink from if we knew
They were awaiting us, assured we ne'er
Could bear so much of anguish or of fear.
But while we pale, and shrink,
And doubt ourselves, and doubt the Love that sends
The griefs so hard to bear, that calls the friends
We've fondly cherished, leaving us to know
The pangs of loss that pierce and tear us so,
He's forging, link by link,
The chain of gold that draws us to His throne
Where sorrow and bereavement are unknown;
And though to us the fierce refining fire,
In which he fits the gold for uses higher
Than we have dared to think,
May seem severe, He knows how much 'twill bear,

And how to form each link so strong and fair
It shall endure to lift us to the place
Where we may catch some glimpses of His face,
And learn the purpose wise
Of Him who kindled for our quiv'ring heart
Such raging flames, though now the torturing smart,
The fierce, sharp agony is all we feel—
Forgetting thus He does the gold anneal.
I would the truth that lies
Beneath the thought so falt'ringly expressed,
Might give your troubled heart the peace and rest
Which you have plainly proved it sorely needs—
The brightness which to utter gloom succeeds.
But did the breaking day
The phantons banish that had made the night
Of which you speak one of such pain and fright
It were a marvel you had lived it through,

And kept your reason, and your hair's bright hue,
Nor turned its bronze to grey!—
As many a head has turned in one brief night—
As many a mind has lost its guiding light."

IV.

"When morning broke at length,"
She says, "in this deep chair where thro' the night
I crouched in terror, longing for the light,
I lay, unconscious of the breaking dawn
Which bids the phantoms of the night be gone.
For that fictitious strength
Which had upheld me through those frightful hours
Had utterly exhausted all its powers,
And Sleep had wrapped me in her shelt'ring arms,
And soothed to silence all the night's alarms.—

Sweet sleep, God's greatest boon
To suff'ring hearts which oft-times scarce could bear
Their fearful weight of anguish or despair,
But for the respite brief she gives to those
Who in her arms forget their fears and woes—
Recalled, alas, too soon,
But by the grace of strength she's sweetly given,
Resumed with patience new, new faith in heaven,
New courage all life's thorny ways to trace,
And look the dreaded future in the face.
And thus, to some extent,
It was to me ; for when a brilliant ray
Of sunlight through yon casement crept to lay
Its warm, bright fingers on my heavy eyes
Which opened suddenly to wide surprise,
I in bewilderment
Around the lonely yet familiar room

From which the morning sunshine chased the
gloom
That filled so darkly every niche and nook
All through the night, gave one astonished look,
And I recalled again
The wild and foolish terror I'd endured,
I almost smiled, so calmed and reassured
My mind had been by Slumber's touches light,
And morning's glad return so rich and bright.
But while my o'er-wrought brain
Its balance had regained, when I essayed
To rise from this deep chair I found dismayed
My wearied frame had not endured so well
The long, hard strain, the sudden shocks that fell
With such terrific force,
So deep a blight upon my peaceful life
Which had so little known of woe or strife.
My temples throbbed with agonizing pain;
My limbs were stiff and aching; every vein

Seemed drawing from its source
A stream of liquid fire, which turned to ice
And rippled slowly back, as with a vice
To close congealing 'round my flutt'ring heart;
My throat was parched with thirst; my lips apart
And fevered with the breath
Which hot and labored through its portals came;
My hands were cold as ice; my cheeks aflame;
And as I strove to rise, and in my chair
Fell fainting back and lay half conscious there,
I did not know but Death,
Whose face of late had so familiar grown,
Was coming now to claim *me* for his own.
If so, not all unwelcome would he be,
For life not many charms now held for me,
Robbed as it was of all
The loves and hopes that make it dear and sweet,
A boon to be desired. But from my seat

I, chill and trembling, raised myself at length,
And rally'ng all of my remaining strength,
Crept through the dusky hall,
And up the stairs, and shiv'ring, faint, and weak,
My own room reached at last. I scarce could speak,
When, summoned by my ring, a servant came,
Such rapid hold upon my feeble frame
This illness had obtained.
But measures prompt soon brought to me relief.
Our good physician in his visits brief
Discovered soon how urgent was my need
Of both companionship and care indeed,
And showed me how unfeigned
His pity and compassion was for me
In my sore strait, by seeking one to be
A nurse not only, but a friend as well.
My gratitude to him I ne'er can tell:
Nor does a day go by

But from my heart I bless him for the ways
In which he showed me kindness in those days.
He nothing said to me of his intent,
But brought her with him ere I knew he meant
My need to thus supply.
A kindly woman, motherly and bright,
Who brought to my dim chamber cheer and light;
Whose gentle touch a soothing charm possessed;
Whose very presence gave a sense of rest
I had not known of late.
To me her kindness could not be surpassed;
And 'neath her constant care I rallied fast,
Although 'twas long ere I had quite regained
The strength for which the shocks I had sustained
Had proved almost too great.
And when at last the bloom of health returned,
And life's warm tide thro' all my pulses burned,

She thought to go, but was with ease prevailed
Upon to tarry; for she had not failed
To see my utter need
Of such companionship, and help, and care
As she could give me; so my earnest prayer
Availed to keep her in my home so lone
From which so much of joy and cheer had flown.
I scarcely know indeed
How I had borne to bide here still, amid
The bitter, mournful memories that hid
Between the leaves of each familiar book—
That seemed from every painted face to look,
And utterance to find
From carven marble lips of statues cold—
To lie emblazoned on the flaming gold
Of crackling coals whereon I oft had read
A story bright with hopes, now like the dead
Round which they were entwined,

Cold, lifeless, crushed, and in the dust laid low,
A joyous resurrection ne'er to know
Till in the future life, by God's good grace,
I shall with both once more stand face to face.
I scarce had borne, I say,
To dwell amid these ruins of my home
Had she to cheer my solitude ne'er come.
She has not left me either day or night,
Till on this morn which dawned so gay and bright,
A summons to obey
From one whose need was greater than my own,
She with reluctance left me here alone.
I had not dreamed—nor she—a night so wild
Would close a day so lovely and so mild,
Or she had answered nay,
Though urgent was the message she received
From one whom a refusal sore had grieved."

V.

"I'm truly glad to find,"
The stranger answers, "you've not been so lone
As at the first seemed by your story shown;
But at the best for long to tarry here
Would be a life too empty, cold, and drear
For one so sweet and kind.
Indeed, I trust it is not your intent
To do so, save until such time be spent
As shall suffice to choose a home once more
Whose charm and cheer shall glad you as of yore;
For surely there are friends,
Beloved and loving, who a welcome glad
To heart and home would give to one so sad,
So utterly alone, whose presence dear
Could scarcely fail to add to all the cheer

Which such a home attends.
I trust ere long that you will bid adieu
To all the gloom and grief this scene keeps
new."
"Nay," she replies, "your hope I fear is vain.
I look for nothing more than to remain
As long as life endures
Within these lonely and deserted halls,
So haunted by the friends each nook recalls—
The friends in taking whom God took my all,
And left me to a fate which might appall
A sterner heart than yours.
'Tis true a welcome glad and kind indeed
My mother's sister in my bitter need
Would give me, with a sympathy as great,
Were she but conscious of my lone estate;
But many a league of land,
And many a stretch of ocean billow lies
Between us two. 'Neath India's burning skies

She dwells, at home; a distance far too wide
For me alone to traverse; so I bide
Here, where God's mighty hand
Has placed me, with such measure of content
As I may gain when pain at last is spent."

VI.

She pauses. For a time
The stranger sits with thoughtful eyes bent down,
And on his open brow a puzzled frown.
The lady's case is worse than he had thought,
And his too kindly heart, which has been taught
A reverence sublime
For womankind, by one he deems the best
Of her sweet sex, sincerely is distressed
At thought of turning coldly from the place

Where while the stormy night wears on apace
He shelter finds, and rest,
To leave alone through all the days to come,
Within her stately but deserted home,
One who, a stranger truly, and no claim
Possessing on his kindness save what came
At sympathy's behest,
And what her youth, and sex, and lonely plight
Had given her—which she might urge by right
Of commonest humanity indeed—
A right which none more freely would concede—
Yet who has so appealed
To his compassion and his sympathies
By artlessly relating—and at his
So urgent wish—the story of the wrong
And sorrow of the past, an int'rest strong,
And only half concealed,
He can but feel for one who all has faced
So bravely, with a wish to see her placed

More happily ere he shall say adieu,
His interrupted journey to pursue.
At length he lifts his eyes
Which seek once more the lady's gentle face:
"And are there then no others who the grace
Of shelter and of welcome to a friend
So sorrowfully placed would glad extend?"
He asks with pained surprise.
She answers sadly: "Nay, not one! aside
From her to whom I have referred, the wide
Cold world holds none on whom I have a claim
However slight; none of my race or name
Are left to me, save her.
So poor am I in friends!" she adds with faint
Sad smile more pitiful than any plaint.
"But he—your father's brother!" he suggests.
"Unless a heart of stone his breast invests,
He surely would confer
On one, like you, of his own blood and name,

And innocent alike of wrong or blame,
The shelter and protection you so need,
A welcome giving both in word and deed.
Or has grim-visaged Death
Borne him as well to yonder shad'wy shore,
To meet the brother he had wronged of yore?"
The faint flush deepens on the lady's cheek,
As in reply she opes her lips to speak
With slightly quickened breath.
"Nay, I believe," she says, "he's living yet;
But I from him whom I have never met
A boon so great as that could scarcely claim,
However bound to him by blood and name.
Indeed, I little know
Of him, or his, except the bitter fact
That one I loved was by his treach'rous act
From home and kindred banished, and his life
So wrecked thereby it gave his gentle wife
A harsh and fatal blow

Which made me motherless when but a child.
I could not stoop to ask of him who spoiled
My father's life, a shelter for my own."
The high uplifted head, the haughty tone,
The scornful little smile
With which she closes, plainly speak the pride
Which in her parent's conduct she decried ;
And prove howe'er she may regret or blame
Their folly, of the same proud race she came.
The stranger notes meanwhile
The haughty words and smile, and haughtier tone,
While his amusement in his face is shown.
But in a moment she has added low:
"I cherish no resentment, for I know
So little of those days
I cannot judge if there was actual wrong,
Or but misfortune in what proved a long
And bitter grief to one. But though 'twere true

No injury was meant, and though I knew
On me the utmost grace
Of kindness and of welcome he'd bestow,
I still could never seek it, you must know.
I think he gave the only son that came
To bless their union my dear father's name.
The which, if true, displays
A kindliness to him who once was dear,
Which argues an affection still sincere."

VII.

The stranger with a start
Bends on the lady's face an eager look,
Akin to that one gives a well-known book
Which though familiar ne'er has been perused,
Whose every page has now become suffused
With meaning to his heart.

Each feature's chiselling his gaze delays,
Then on the portraits smiling in the blaze
Of clustered lights he turns his curious eyes
Where slowly dawns a subtle sweet surprise,
A hope but half defined,—
A hope so new and bright, a hope so sweet
It quickens every pulse to fuller beat—
So sweet he scarce dares put it to the touch
Lest it should vanish. Yet he wonders much
That he has been so blind,
As with his eyes again bent on the floor
Her story point by point he now goes o'er.
So for a time he silent doth remain;
Then to her face his gaze he lifts again,
And with a bright, glad smile
Which she remarking scarce can understand,
Draws forth a card and lays it in her hand,
And softly says—"Permit me!" With surprise
The lady drops thereon her wond'ring eyes,

The stranger all the while
Her sweet face watching with his curious gaze,
To see surprise give place to blind amaze,
As 'graved thereon she reads one glowing line,—
Just—"*Stuart Marjoram*," in letters fine.
Her lips unclose at last:
"What means this, sir? This is my father's name!"
She trembling says. "Yes? And my own's the same.
Dear lady, we are cousins!" he replies,
The sweet, glad smile still ling'ring in his eyes.
"A story of the past
Not all unlike the one which you have told,
In many points, I might to you unfold
If it were needed to make good my claim
To your dear father's loved and honored name.
The card within your hand
I trust is proof convincing to your mind

That strongest ties of blood and kinship bind
Us two together; otherwise I scarce
Had even heard ere now the name it bears.
I cannot understand
How I have been so stupid as to hear
From first to last your story, and my ear
Remain so dull—ay more! so wholly sealed
To that one fact which every word revealed.
A story I have known
In many of its details from my youth;
And therefore can assure you of the truth
And honor of that brother whose whole life
Has been o'ershadowed by the hour of strife
Which parted him from one
Who till that fatal day had been his best,
His dearest friend; while he had never guessed
That they were rivals for the same dear hand.
And so be sure, sweet cousin, such demand
As you may '*stoop*' to make

Of him for welcome and affection kind,
In fullest measure granted you will find.
Ad-interim, I beg you will extend
To me, *no more a stranger, but a friend*
For whose unworthy sake
You've been the long night through of rest debarred,
The added grace of cousinly regard."

VIII.

Bewildered with surprise
Which o'er each feature eloquently plays;
Half comprehending all the stranger says;
Half doubting what he smilingly assumes;
Half shrinking when in closing he presumes
To take the hand that lies
So passively upon her knee, she sits

In wond'ring silence, while a soft thrill flits
Along the throbbing sluices of her heart,
To feel the hope that he would fain impart
Increase in force and strength,
As slowly dawns in her bewildered mind
A consciousness of what 'twould be to find
In one who seems so noble, kind and true,
A friend not only, but a kinsman too;
And she perceives at length
How strong the case which he has proven shows,
How little room for doubt the facts disclose.
And so she says at last: "Can it be true?
It seems scarce possible! Ah, would I knew!—
And yet—if 'twere not so—
How could you have my father's very name,
Which by this bit of pasteboard you would claim?"
The stranger smiles: "Sweet doubter, it is true—

All I have said. Those eyes of chestnut hue
Which in yon portrait glow,
Are but the counterpart in look and smile
Of eyes whose gentle glance so free from guile
I all my life have known ; that firm, square chin,
That mouth reserved and proud which closes in
The secrets of the heart,
Are all familiar as my father's own.
I do not need to ask whose face is shown
Upon that square of canvas ; nor surmise
Where you obtained the bronze hue of your eyes,
The proud curves that impart
So much of character to lips of rose,
And break the softness of your mouth's repose.
Dear Cousin, will you still reject the friend
And kinsman who before you low would bend,
And sue for that regard
Which howso'er unworthy he would claim
At least by virtue of his blood and name ?"

"Nay—I can doubt no more!" she softly says.
"You prove your title in too many ways.
Nor is it very hard
To credit what will be to me, if true,
Of greater moment then it *can* to you.
So since the past is past, and you have come
To seek me in my own far-distant home—
Howe'er unwittingly—
And since so humbly, and so kindly too,
For the great boon of my regard you sue,
I can no more your earnest plea resist.
Your claims I own, your proofs I gladly list.
Kind cousin, now from me
Accept a cordial welcome to my home,
Whither by force of adverse winds you come."
The while a playful smile lights up her face,
She with a gesture of bewitching grace
Both little hands extends,
To ratify the welcome she has given,

The kinship which to prove he so has striven.
He takes the soft white hands; he murmurs low:
"Ah, thanks! by this sweet token then I know
We cousins are, and friends.
Said I not right," he adds with bright arch smile,
"That Fate had led me many a weary mile,
Through night and storm, thro' perils great and drear,
O'er field and flood, at last to bring me—*here?*
Or rather I would say
That God's kind hand all thro' the bleak, wild night
Has been my guide, has pointed me aright,
And through the darkness and the driving storm
Has led me hither to your fireside warm,
That ere the breaking day
Shall flush the pale face of the east with red,
We two might find the tiny, silken thread

Which leading from my book of life to yours,
Of kinship and of friendship warm assures.
May it ne'er break, I pray,
Till death to sever it at length shall come,
And we take up the threads in God's dear home!"

MORNING.

I.

O breaks the morn at last!
And standing in the twilight cold and
grey,
Between the crimson curtains drawn away
From yonder casement wide, the cousins gaze
Upon the fairy scene the dawn displays,
As, creeping bright and fast
Above the eastern hills, she throws a flood
Of rosy light on mountain, field, and wood,
O'er which the last hours of the stormy night
Have dropped a mantle fleecy soft and white.
The scene is passing fair!

The sweeping avenue arched o'er with trees
Which, stirring gently in the morning breeze,
Sift soft a show'r of down their branches through;
While through the narr'wing vista one may view
A picture bright as rare:
A long, wide stretch of meadow spread with snow,
Touched in the distance with the dawn's red glow;
Beyond, a village, with its gables quaint,
Its pointed spires, its smoke-wreaths blue and faint
Against a sky of rose,
Lies nestled at yon lofty mountain's base
Whose parti-colored robes have given place
Since evening fell to one of downy white,
Which hides the ravages the stormy night
Has, ruthless, wrought on those;

While in the distance, farther, farther still,
Beyond the sweep of meadow, hamlet, hill,
All gleam and glitter, all one golden blaze,
As strike thereon the rising sun's first rays,
Swells the blue, tossing sea—
Heaving with fury of the tempest born—
Still angry, though the soft voice of the Morn
Would fain speak peace, and hush its wrath to sleep—
Still restless, though the wild winds silence keep—
Still leaping high and free,
And tossing in the air the gleaming spray
With which the dancing sunbeams seem at play—
All set within the arch of meeting trees,
A frame that shifts with every shifting breeze.
That in the background gay.
And in the fore the mansion's well-kept grounds;

Like frosted loaves their heaped-up flower
mounds;
Like frescoed arabesques picked out with white
Each tree, and vine, and shrub, whose trac'ries
light
Against the pale sky play;
Each ivied urn has donned a snowy hood;
Each woodland nymph that 'mid the shubb'ry
stood
Has caught the falling mantle on her arms,
In vain attempt to hide therein her charms
Which, spite of all her cares,
Break thro' the filmy dress and stand revealed,
Too fair to be by *any* robe concealed;
Each rustic arbor, each rose-trellis frail,
Has been roofed in with white; a snowy veil
Each silent fountain wears;
The brilliant, dying leaves the wind had piled
In cosy nooks ere came the tempest wild,

Have snugly been tucked up beneath the warm
And downy robe dropped by the fleeing storm ;
And as the sun mounts higher,
And over sea and mountain hither comes,
Veiled fount, and nymph, and snow-decked arbor domes,
Tree, shrub, and frosted mound, and hooded urn,
Touched by its dazzling radiance seem to burn
With points of living fire,
Until the whole wide picture is aglow,
And lovelier than any words can show.

II.

Since the new day awoke
And thrust its "rosy fingers" thro' the blind
To beckon them who, woud'ring still to find
They never had been strangers, lingered on

Beside the waning fire till night was gone,
And the bright morn bespoke
Their notice of her blushing charms, the two
Have stood beside the window wide, to view
The transformation which the coming sun
Is working on a scene as fair as one
Need seek to feast the sight.
"Ah, see!" he says, as with surprise his gaze
Falls on the snow flushed with the first red rays
Of coming day. "Ah, see! while we, within,
Have from the vanished past essayed to win
A hope both sweet and bright,
To pierce and gild the haze that floats about
The fateful, unknown future, Time, without,
At one grand stride—light-footed, shod with list—
Has stepped from Autumn's gold and purple mist,
Deep into Winter's snows.
Is it but wingèd hours have flown away

Since for a shelter I presumed to pray?
Or have the speeding months rolled on apace
Since first I looked upon your gentle face
In which all sweetness glows,
And brought us deep into another year,
While we have sat in pleasant converse here?"
"One well might fancy," smiling she replies,
"It were the last: that Time, who ever flies
So swiftly—save to those
Of heavy heart—had gained new impetus,
And in his rapid flight had wafted us
Unconscious, past the old and dying year,
And dropped us in the new, with all its dear
And tender hopes and dreams—
So changed this scene since darkness softly fell
And in its dusky garments wrapped it well;
So much of import closely folded lay
Between the midnight and the dawning day;
So bright the rosy beams

Which morning throws across the shadowed way
In which I walked ere came the evening grey.
I scarce can think a few fleet hours alone
Lie 'twixt the days of sadness I have known,
Days empty, hopeless, drear,
And this, which brings to me a friend, endeared
By ties of race and name, and those revered
Associations of a sacred past
Bequeathed by them who suffered, loved, and passed
From both, into the near
Yet unknown future, where the loves and hates
This strange and checkered life of ours creates,
Shall be resolved into the perfect joy
Whose constancy and sweetness cannot cloy.—
A *friend* who brings to me
The cheer not only of his int'rest kind,
But promises so much beside, I find

My heart grows buoyant 'neath the brighter
hopes
He kindly would impart, the view he opes
Of days that are to be.
So terrible it is to be so lone!
So sweet the ties of kin once more to own!"
The man stoops low, and with his bearded lips
He touches rev'rently the finger tips
That, soft and rosy, lie
Upon the dark and polished window seat;
The while his heart throbs with a quickened beat,
And his dark eyes with sudden moisture dim,
To hear such gracious words addressed to him
From lips so proud and shy.
And as he lifts his head, and meets the eyes
In whose bronze depths a faint amazement lies,
He smiles, and softly says: "Dear Marguerite,
Not to you only is this new bond sweet,
Nor chiefly; for to me

It is the dear fulfillment of a dream
Which filled my heart in boyhood with supreme
And earnest longing naught could satisfy.
In kindred scarce more rich than you; too shy—
Too proud, perhaps, to flee
To other homes for such companionships
As mine was wanting in, when from the lips
Of my dear mother I the story heard
Which you have told me, my young heart was stirred
With deep delight to know
The world held those who by a tie so near
Were bound to me, though from us, once so dear,
They long had been estranged, and dwelt afar,
But not e'en this my pleasure keen could mar;
And thenceforth all the glow
Of boyhood's dreams converged its brilliant rays

Around those unknown friends, who thro' the haze
Of romance viewed, seemed dear beyond compare.
So 'twere not strange I scarcely could forbear
A strong desire to seek
And know them who by bonds so strong were bound
To me and mine. So dwelt my fancies round
The loved unknown for many a day;—till one
Who had, like you, by death been left alone,
Came to us to bespeak
That tenderness and care her youth required,
And brought to me what I had long desired—
A sister's love and dear companionship,
And filled the want, which seldom on my lip,
Dwelt ever in my heart.
And now, the dream which vanished long ago

Becomes a dear reality! And so,
Sweet cousin, you perceive the gain to you
Which in this just discovered tie you view,
Finds its full counterpart
In that the kinship new confers on him
Who sees fulfilled thereby dreams long grown dim."

III.

The morn advances fast!
The sun has crept high up amid the blue;
The fleecy robe the flying tempest threw
On meadow, mansion, mountain, woodland gay,
Has by the warm hands of the god of day
Been gathered up, and cast
In diamond drops upon the frosty earth,
Thus working on the scene since morning's birth

Another change as speedy as the first—
Almost as wondrous, too, as that which burst
On their astonished sight
When Day revealed the work the night had wrought
Swiftly and still as is the flight of thought.
And yet, in shady nooks cool hands have clung
To the fair robe which o'er them had been flung,
And which the sun-god bright,
However ardent be his touch, and bold,
Not yet has wrested from their clinging hold.
Before the door, where as the midnight rang,
His courser's hoofs had ceased their startling clang,
And he in eager tones
Besought a shelter from the driving storm,
To find within a fireside bright and warm,
The stranger sits upon his prancing steed,
The farewell halting on his lips indeed,

While in his heart he owns
A strange reluctance from the mansion grey
If only for a time, to turn away.
And she who gave him welcome to her home,
And found, surprised, ere the new day had come,
That she had entertained,
Though unawares, a kinsman and a friend,
Who should new hope into her sad life send,
Now standing in the porch, her parting guest
To speed with kindest wishes, unconfessed
E'en to herself, a pained
And scarce defined regret stirs in her heart
To say farewell, and see her guest depart.
The morning breeze plays with her sable dress,
And brushes her fair cheek with light caress,
A deeper rose to' impart;
The sun's soft glory all about her lies;

Her hands, uplifted, shade her dazzled eyes
From its too ardent rays; a soft, sweet smile
Around her proud lips lingers, though the while
Regret is in her heart;
The rich brown braids that crown her queenly head,
No longer bronze, are rippled gold instead,
As tenderly thereon the sunlight lays
The warmth and brilliance of its gathered rays;
And as, unconscious quite
How fair the picture she is making shows
To him who his departure still foregoes,
She on the topmost step stands, in the sheen
With which the perfect morning floods the scene,
His dark eyes fill with light—
He gazes long as though he would imprint

Upon his heart each feature, outline, tint
Which marks the picture where his glances rest.
Then with regret in one long sigh expressed,
Seeks his adieus to frame.
"Once more farewell! farewell, dear Marguerite!"
He says in tones with tenderness made sweet.
"Bide here, content, one brief month, till I come
And take you with me to my own dear home,
Where, though you '*stoop*' to claim
A shelter and a welcome, or forbear,
It shall be yours, and in no niggard share.
And meanwhile in your dreams of future days,
O'er which sweet Hope shall shed her brightest rays,
And coming joy foretell,
May your unworthy cousin find a place!

I go! but take with me your dear, sweet face.
God have you in His keeping till I come,
And let no harmful thing approach your home!
Again farewell—*farewell!*"
With one long glance upon the lady's face,
One last, slow smile, full of a tender grace,
He lifts his cap—low in his saddle bends—
Then slowly wheels—and slowly onward wends.
Down the long avenue
His steed's hoofs ring. Between the arching trees
That sigh and flutter in the morning breeze,
She sees him pass—regarding him with eyes
Wherein the smile of pleasure slowly dies
As he is lost to view.
With ear intent she lists each hoof-beat's fall,
The silence closing 'round her like a pall

As dies the last. Stands wrapt in rev'ry long.
A bird trills out a tardy morning song
Upswinging to the blue.
She starts — looks up — the morn is wearing on—
A door shuts softly—and she too is gone.

CHRISTMAS-TIDE.

I.

ARK to the pealing bells.
Upon the frosty air, from far and near,
Rings out their merry chiming sharp and clear,
And as their music floats o'er hill and plain,
While the glad echoes chant a soft refrain,
Each note a story tells
To Christian ears so wonderful and sweet
No loyal heart but throbs with richer beat,
As thought flows backward to that wondrous night
When, heralded by songs of angels bright,

Our glorious King was born.
"Peace on the earth, good will, good will to men!"
Far sweeter rings the anthem now than then,
As, borne upon the clear voice of the bells,
Down through the ages still the glad song swells
Triumphant over scorn.
For in the heart of millions, sweet and strong,
Is echoed now the wonderful new song
Which on that night two thousand years ago
O'er sleeping Bethl'hem floated, soft and slow,
Up from Rephaim borne.
"Peace on the earth, good will, good will to men!"
Joy through the carol swelled and throbbed e'en then,
When on the bright hush of the eastern night
The glad refrain first rung, as poised in flight
The angel chorus sang;

But deeper notes of joy and triumph swell
Through the sweet song, the tidings which to tell
The bright choir came, as o'er the whole wide earth
Thrilled with the meaning of that wondrous birth,
Today the anthem rang.
"Peace on the earth, good will, good will to men,
For Christ the Lord is born in Bethlehem!"

II.

As peal on peal the bells
Ring out the Christmas chimes from yonder tower,
Swift through the village street the self-same hour,

O'er the smooth, shining track of trodden snow
A light sleigh glides. Its fleet steeds swifter go
As the rich music swells
Upon the frosty air, and drowns the chime
Of bells which with the deeper tones keep time
As faster on they fly, till far behind
The sounding peal is left. The winter wind
Sighs through the tree-tops bare,
And on strong wings sweeps downward with a rush,
Till two fair cheeks beneath its cold breath flush
With a deep glow that suits their roundness well;
While two dark eyes which on the roses dwell,
No admiration spare;
And bending nearer, round a slender form
A strong hand closer tucks the wrappings warm
To shield it from the rude touch of the breeze
Which, swooping lower, tears them off with ease,

And laughs at all his care.
Then up and off the wild wind sweeps once more,
And through the tree-tops with majestic roar
Flies swiftly eastward, on its mighty wings
To bear afar the joyous news that rings
From every tall church tower.
Deep in the azure ether Night's fair queen
Reclines at ease, and with a grace serene
Looks down upon our little world, till lo,
It blooms and sparkles with a silver glow
Beneath her bright smile's power.
And far, and near, swept by the soft moonlight,
Piled drift on drift, the gleaming snow lies white.

III.

Since climbed the morning sun
From out the blue depths of the throbbing sea,
Up tow'rd the zenith's azure soaring free,
The two—fair Marguerite, and he who came
One stormy night her fireside's cheer to claim,
And gracious welcome won,—
In warm furs wrapped, swift o'er the gleaming road
Which lies between her desolate abode
And his proud home, by fleet steeds have been borne,
Till into night the frosty day has worn,
And the last mile is passed.
For as the bells' sweet chiming dies away—
Left in the distance—from the broad highway,

Through sheltered lane, o'er hillock's rugged
ridge,
Through clanging gate, and park, o'er rustic
bridge,
To snow-swept drive borne fast,
They come, they come! And now before their
sight
Looms up the mansion in the pale moon's light,
And in a moment close before the door
The neighing steeds have paused—the journey's
o'er,
And *home* is reached at last.
The panting horses, with one final shake
Of bells whose tinkles softest echoes wake,
Stand silent on the drive; the light breeze stirs
Among the spiny branches of the firs
Which deep black shadows trace
Upon the moonlit whiteness of the snow;
The mansion's every window is aglow

The man the ribbons flinging from his hands
Leaps from the sleigh, beside the lady stands
With bright and smiling face,
And hands extended as he murmurs low:
"Sweet cousin, *welcome home!*" The warm rich glow
The winter wind had painted on her cheeks,
Dies out in pallor which more plainly speaks
Than any words could do,
The shrinking she still feels at meeting those
Who utter strangers are, however close
The ties of blood which each to each may bind,
And claiming at their hands a welcome kind.
He marks the pallid hue
Which chases from her cheeks the color bright,
As o'er them streams from open door the light,
And as he lifts her gently from the sleigh,
He bends above her tenderly to say:
"My peerless Marguerite,

This is your *home;* call back the roses fled
From these fair cheeks; there's nothing, dear, to dread,
This is your home; and here home's utmost cheer
Shall soon dispel your every doubt and fear.
So welcome, cousin sweet!
Fond care and love beyond that open door
Wait to surround and guard you evermore."
He takes her hand, which flutters in his hold
Like frightened bird in hand of hunter bold;
And leads her, trembling, pale,
Up the broad steps of his palatial home,
And through the open door whence streaming come
The brilliant lights that speak of warmth and cheer,
Suggesting welcome loving and sincere.
The lilies still prevail

Upon her cheek, as o'er the threshold wide,
Her hand in his, the two step, side by side.

IV.

A broad and lofty hall!
Its marble floor, except for rugs, left bare;
Ascending either side a winding stair;
At farther end a fireplace wide and deep
Piled high with logs round which the red flames leap
Half way to mantel tall;
The blue-tiled hearth clean-swept with tidy care;
The wall hung close with pictures old and rare;
Broad, oak-framed sofas; carven chairs with arms
Spread wide to tempt a trial of their charms;
Low footstools placed before;

Dark, Christmas holly gleaming everywhere—
Festooned above each picture, doorway, chair—
From frieze to lighted candelabra looped;
And at the nearer end three persons grouped.
All this the open door
Gives up to view, as o'er the threshold wide,
Her hand in his, the two step, side by side.

V.

One moment, while she stands
Half blinded by the dazzling flow of light,
All objects mingling to her 'wildered sight;
While her companion to the greeting fond
Each gives in turn doth joyously respond;
And then he takes her hands,
And with a word presents her to the friends

Around her grouped. One questioning glance she bends
Upon the faces near lit up with smiles
Whose kindliness each ling'ring doubt beguiles,
Then words of welcome sweet
Fall on her ears, while two soft arms are prest
Around her close; by soft lips are caressed
Brow, cheek, and mouth; and she looks up with sighs
Of sweet content, the glance of loving eyes
Soft, dark, and deep to meet,
While 'neath their smiles the past hour's vague alarm
Dissolves like frost beneath the sunlight warm.
How kind, and sweet, and motherly the face
Of her who holds her in that close embrace
A welcome warm to' impart!
What wonder they had loved her passing well—

The two who wooed her in her youth! that fell
Had been the blow to one when first he learned
The love he gave in kind was unreturned!
What wonder in his heart
Her lovely image lingered long and sweet,
Though deep the pain that through each mem'ry beat!
So thinking, stands content within the arm
Enfolding her, succumbing to the charm
That motherly embrace
Possesses for her lonely orphan heart;
The while her late companion stands apart,
Regarding both with smiles, well pleased to mark
The light that fills his mother's eyes so dark,
The new bloom in the face
Of her who from this meeting shrank with dread
Which deeper grew with every hour that sped.

A moment standing thus a voice she hears
Whose deep low tones hold something to her ears
Which speaks of other days,
And she looks up to see a noble face
So like her father's in each manly grace
The quick tears start unbidden to her eyes;
And then her hand within his warm grasp lies,
Her head is on his breast;
And while he pushes from her forehead fair
The soft and drooping bands of gold-brown hair,
He says with trembling, half-familiar tone,
His eyes the while as dim as are her own
As on her face they rest—
"And you are Stuart's daughter! Ah, my dear,
Believe me you are more than welcome here,
And that no other hither could have come
To be *so welcome* both to heart and home;
God bless my brother's child!

This is a joy I had not thought to know.
God make you happy with us!" Broken, low,
The old man's tones become, and plainly show
How deep regret has dwelt his calm below;
How to be reconciled
To that dear brother once so fondly loved
His heart has longed through what indeed has proved
A life-long separation.—From his arm
Released at last, she turns to meet the warm
And cordial kiss of one
She till this moment scarcely has perceived—
A lady young and fair, whose lips a grieved
Sad droop possess which shows beneath the smile
That, sweet and cordial, round them plays the while
She greeting speaks. The sun
That turns whate'er it shines upon to gold

Is scarce more bright than are the tresses rolled
Away from that low brow so fair and white;
Eyes like forget-me-nots, whose tender light
Seems almost quenched in dew;
And cheeks whose rose and roundness show that youth
And perfect health are hers. She is in truth
Most wondrous fair; and yet her flow'r-like face
Of some great pain or passion holds the trace,
Awaking in each true
And noble heart a strange deep tenderness
For her whose grief they scarcely more than guess.

VI.

As warm upon her cheek
The lady's greeting kiss falls, Marguerite

Still half bewildered gazes on the sweet
And smiling face, perplexed her name to guess—
Forgetting her who in her loneliness
Had hither come, to seek
The loving care she since that day had known
When, but a child, Death left her all alone.
Such wonderment her puzzled face betrays,
Her cousin, stepping nearer, smiling says:
"This, Marguerite, is she,
The sister, who I told you came to fill
The longing—which till then was never still—
For such companionship as many a home
Is rich in, but to mine had never come
Till came my *Rose* to me.
To-day gives us another flower sweet,
A fragrant, brown-eyed *daisy*, Marguerite!
But, lest the frost should blight its dainty charm,
I'll place it at yon fireside bright and warm,
Until its heart expands

Beneath the genial glow that flame emits."
As thus he playful speaks a bright smile flits
Across her face, while to the blazing fire
He leads her, wheels a deep chair nigher,
And seats her there. Soft hands
With gentle touch her wrappings thick remove;
The eyes that meet her own are full of love;
Each hovers near her with assiduous care;
And leaning in the soft depths of her chair
While round her gently creeps
The genial glow and warmth—a sense of all
The kindness that surrounds her, that deep pall
Of sorrow which in many a heavy fold
Has wrapped her for so long, now all unrolled,
Slips off:—her free heart leaps
With grateful joy—her face is all aglow—
"Ah, *this* is home, and rest!" she murmurs low.

LOVE.

I.

HE blush and bloom of May!
O'erhead a sky one stretch of lovely blue;
Far in the west soft clouds of roseate hue;
Beneath the feet a sward from whose rich green
Sweet blue-eyed violets peeping may be seen;
On either side the way
Trees garlanded to topmost bough with bloom,
The pink lips breathing forth a soft perfume
Upon the atmosphere now burdened deep
With mingled odors which the sunbeams steep
In golden warmth and light,

Till all the air the essence is of balm,
Pure, grateful, soft, warm, odorous, and calm.
To breathe it in intoxicates the sense
With pleasure thrilling, subtle, and intense,
An undefined delight.
Upon the em'rald sward the witching play
Of gold-haired sunbeams with the shadows grey;
And swinging high, and flitting low and near,
Forth pouring music ravishing and clear,
Glad birds in plumage bright,
Fresh from their journey from that sunny land
Where all the year the winds blow soft and bland.

II.

Beneath the blooming boughs
Which send their luscious perfume far and wide,
Two steeds of dapple-grey pace side by side;

Their slow steps crushing mid the velvet green
The blue-eyed violets smiling there unseen,
Whose dying breath endows
With deeper fragrance all the ambient air.
Living or dying sweet beyond compare—
These lovely flow'rs crushed by the feet that go
Unheeding, with a steady step and slow
On through the shadowed lane.
The one horse proudly bears a lady fair
Whose cheeks a pink like yonder peach-bloom wear;
Whose downcast eyes no single glance permit;
Whose face is with a mystic brightness lit,
And keeps no trace of pain.
Two small gloved hands the bridle lightly hold;
Around her flowing, sable fold on fold,
Her heavy dress sweeps almost to the ground;
Her hat's long plume her flushed face floats around,

Its fair tints to enhance.

In swaying form, in half-averted face,
In heaving bosom, quickened breath, we trace
A subtle consciousness that tells a tale
Whose blissful meaning one can scarcely fail
To gather at a glance.
Life's May has come, all beauty, blush, perfume,
And her awakened heart bursts into bloom!
Upon the other horse, her good steed's mate,
A man with form erect, and face elate,
Rides, closely at her side.
His bridl lies upon his horse's neck;
His hand is on the lady's rein to check
Her pace to match his own; a tender smile
Is on his lips; his dark eyes rest the while
Upon the crimson tide
That mantles in the face he deems so sweet;
His heart is throbbing with impassioned beat;

His cheek is flushed; his breath breaks up in sighs;
While deeper, darker, softer grow the eyes
Which dwell upon her face.
His whole man's nature is intensely stirred;
But still he breaks the silence by no word;
And still the two in blissful peace remain,
As softly through the velvet, flow'r-strewn lane
They slowly onward pace.
What hour to come can be so sweet as this—
So full of subtle, all-pervading bliss!
What speech so tender that it would not jar
Upon a joy a breath will sometimes mar!
What *need* of words to speak
The passion throbbing through these flutt'ring hearts,
Whose every sigh the story sweet imparts!
But e'en an hour like this its last sand drops.
The gate is reached at last—beside it stops

Each dappled steed so sleek.
One word, soft-spoken, breaks the happy hush;
'Tis only—"*Marguerite!*" but yet the flush
Upon her face grows deeper; from her eyes
One swift, bright glance is flashed, then darkly lies
Their fringe upon her cheek.
A smile lights up his face from brow to chin;
The gate is opened, and the two pass in.

DOUBT.

I.

WITHOUT, a summer storm!
With fingers soft it taps against the pane,
To gain an entrance seeking, but in vain;
Along the tiled roof patters with light feet,
Sighing, and whispering a story sweet
Of climes where breezes warm
Blow over banks of ever-blooming flowers;
Where dreamily glide by the swift-winged hours;
Where seas are blue, and skies are ever bright;
Where but to breathe is exquisite delight;

Stoops with caressing touch
O'er crocus, hyacinth, and violet blue,
On each flow'r-face to leave a brighter hue;
Shakes playfully the nodding clover blooms,
And flutters all the willows' budding plumes;
With passion overmuch
Sweeps o'er the lawn, and through the blooming trees,
All its soft fury spending upon these
Which of the gala robes they late have worn
Themselves are swift divesting, till the torn
And rain-stained fragments strew
With snowy patches all the greensward bright,
And they stand clad in garments fresh and light,
Their summer work all ready to begin,
Whose fruits the autumn shall see gathered in;
And softly drops, and slow,
The summer rain upon the smiling earth,
Waking new flower-babes to joyous birth.

II.

Within, a dainty room
Adorned with all that can delight or please,
Conduce to comfort or luxurious ease.
Beside the casement stands a lady slight,
Her face, sometime so winsome, rosy, bright,
Now clouded o'er with gloom.
Her brow is pressed against the window-pane
Where vainly tap the fingers of the rain;
Her hand, impatient, beats upon the sill;
Her mouth, though tremulous, is prideful still;
Her rounded cheek is pale;
Her eyes are full of tears that do not fall;
But ah, her *heart* is sadder far than all.
The love that thrilled it late with rapture sweet,
Already turned to pain, with anguished beat
Throbs through it; while the veil

Her pride has thrown across the tortured face
Of that fair love, is growing thin apace,
As left alone she at the window stands
And listens sadly to its stern demands.
The time is past o'er-soon
When love unspoken can content her heart;
The *words* are needed now peace to impart,
And put to flight the doubts, and wild unrest
That fill to agony her troubled breast.
How sweet, till yester-noon,
Her love had been! how perfect was the trust
Reposed in his! how low amid the dust
They each are lying now, cast down by him
Who won them both; who, filling to the brim
Her cup with life's rich wine,
Had, ere she scarce could taste it, from her hand
The goblet snatched! She scarce can understand
Why it is thus; why he has sought to win
Her love, if he's another set within

His deep heart's inmost shrine.
Is he so selfish as to cause her pain—
Aye, *worse*, humiliation—to obtain
The idle purpose of an hour's supine
And vain amusement? Must she then resign
Respect as well as love
For one she deemed so noble, true, and kind,
In whom she has believed with heart and mind?
Or has she been so vain as to mistake
The nature of that love he sought to wake—
Of that he *seemed* to prove
In every tender smile, and act, and word,
Which to profoundest depths her heart has stirred?
At thought of this her cheeks grow red and hot.
"It must be true!" she thinks. "He loves me not;
Or else what can it mean
That I should see him hold her to his breast

With 'passioned clasp; that his dark face should
rest
With touch caressing on her rose-pink cheek
Which on his shoulder lay. No words can speak
The pang with which, unseen,
I turned and fled. And though I veiled my face
With pride, and met them later with no trace
Of consciousness or pain, God only knows
The heavy cloud that little picture throws
Across my heart; how deep
The iron has entered in my very soul.
Thank God I've kept a semblance of control
Upon my pain when either has been near;
But oh, it's hard—*so hard!* He is *so dear!*
Would I were but asleep
And dreaming! I might waken then to find
He whom I trusted still is true and kind.
But no! he loves me not! it is no dream!
'Tis not for me, a joy so deep, supreme!

But oh, I still will keep
My faith in him in whom I have believed;
He *must* be true; I have myself deceived;
It's terrible to know I've loved unsought;
But e'en that bitter knowledge is not fraught
With such o'erwhelming pain
As to believe him selfish, false, unkind.
Why should he not prefer her? I've been blind,
Vain, foolish, or I long ago had seen
The deep, deep love existing them between,
And known mine must be vain.
And she is worthy too, is good, and sweet;
But oh, *'tis hard!* God give me grace to meet
This bitter, bitter trial; to conceal
From him—from her, the pain I can but feel,
The torturing jealousy
Which wrings my heart with agony intense,
And quivers wildly through each conscious sense.
How can I bear to see her at his side

Day after day, his loved and cherished bride;
How can I bear to see
Him give to her the love I thought my own,
Which for one little week has o'er me shone
With joy and blessing in its every ray;
How can I bear to see it melt away
From my too eager grasp,
And see another wear the crown I crave!
Oh God! I thought when from my father's grave
I turned away, and to my empty home
Went back alone, no sorrow that could come
In after days could rasp
With such sore agony my stricken heart.
But oh, I did not know! this stinging smart
Burns deeper far; this woe has elements
Which entered not in that, deep and intense
As was that hour's distress.
I thought I'd passed from pain to peace at last;

That in this home of sweetness unsurpassed
I might find happiness and rest, and be
From loneliness and sorrow henceforth free.
How could I know, or guess
The hand that led me hither so would wound;
And turn to pain again the peace I'd found!"
'*Tis hard* the hand should stab that has caressed,
The lips betray our own have often pressed!
What wonder that her soul
Is stung to madness as the first wild pain
Of slighted love sweeps through it—giv'n in vain,
Unsought, unwished; as on to coming days
She throws despairingly her anguished gaze,
And feels upon her roll
A heavier burden than she yet has borne,
Deep as have been the griefs her heart have torn.
Upon her face has died the hot red glow

Of wounded pride; but hotter tears o'erflow
Her aching eyes, and burn
Adown the velvet whiteness of her cheek;
Her proud lips tightly closed, her clinched hands speak
The effort she is making to control
The burning tide; the surge of thoughts that roll
Their turbid waves in turn
Across her heart; to don the mask of pride
She for a moment's space has thrown aside.

III.

A light tap on the door—
Unheard by her who at the window stands
With quiv'ring lips compressed and tight-clinched hands,

And eyes whose lashes brown are gemmed with tears,
Restrained from falling now, while with the fears,
And doubts, and anguish sore
That swell within her heart she bravely fights,
Though e'en the struggle but new pain excites.
And so the gentle tap she does not hear;
The softly-op'ning door unto her ear
Conveys no conscious sound;
But now upon the carpet footsteps fall—
Steps so familiar they at once recall
Her absent senses from the bitter power
Of thoughts that sting, back to the present hour.
She starts, and turning round,
Looks in the smiling face of him she loves.
Then, conscious what her agitation proves—
How utterly she's failed to don again

Her mask of pride, which should conceal her pain,
An agony of shame
Throbs through her, and she turns away her head,
While to her very brow a deep, hot red
Burns up the whiteness of her quiv'ring face,
And yet more plainly her distress betrays.
She feels the surging flame
With anger and disgust that she should fail
Her face with cool indifference to veil
In presence of the very one she'd fain
In ign'rance of her folly should remain.
How could she so forget
The unlocked door! but then, she had not meant
To so give way to this new discontent,
This new, sharp pain, when she—how long ago?
Had entered here and paused to list the slow
And rhythmic minuet

The rain was tripping on the window pane.
And then the bitterness that deep had lain
Since yester-noon crushed down within her soul,
Had torn its way through all the self-control
She had built up with care
To hide the ruins of her love and trust,
Till she could bury both deep in the dust.
And this was the result! She had betrayed,
And that to *him*, the sorrow that had made
Her heart so sore; laid bare
The secret, jealous pain she'd giv'n her life
To hide from him and all.—Sharp as a knife
These bitter thoughts cut through her young, proud heart,
And swifter than my words have pow'r to' impart;
For almost ere she turns
Her face away from him, he to her side

Has sprung, the smile from out his eyes has
died,
And deep concern, surprise, and wond'ring pain
Are written there instead. The crimson stain
Which to her temple burns
As she her face averts from his fond gaze,
He sees, but it no meaning new conveys;
And ere it dies his arm is 'round her waist,
Her head against his throbbing heart is placed,
And, spite of her attempt
To free herself from his embracing arm,
He holds her close—exclaims with vague alarm:
"My darling, what is this? what mean these
tears?
They fill my heart with nameless painful fears.
I truly had not dreamt
You were not happy. What can have occurred
To wound you so? speak, Marguerite, one word,
And tell me it is naught—a mem'ry sad—

The thought of olden days. Say you are glad
And happy in the love
You know so well is yours. My Daisy, speak!"
He bends his lips upon her glowing cheek.—
"You have no sorrow now I may not share—
No grief that is not mine—no woe—no care."
Ah, what does all this prove?
Was she then only dreaming yester-noon—
And does he love her—*her?* is that great boon
To be her own indeed? Is it all true—
What he just now has said? Thus swiftly thro'
Her half bewildered heart
These blissful doubts flit, while beneath her cheek
His heart is beating; while he bids her speak
And set at rest the fears he can't but feel
At finding her like this; while to conceal
The joy his words impart,

Her face she nestles closer to his breast,
While in his arms she yet is fondly pressed.

IV.

As still he softly pleads
For but one word that shall her tears explain,
She lifts her eyes—which now have filled again—
And flushed, and smiling too, and shy yet proud,
Seeks in his face the love he has avowed.
With one swift glance she reads
The truth and passion of his faithful heart,
And *knows* at last she reigns in every part.
"Well—Marguerite?" he says, as on his breast
She drops her face once more, with ah, such rest!
And then she murmurs low:

"Oh it is nothing, Stuart! I am glad—
Glad as the birds. If painful thoughts and sad
Were mine a moment since, they now are fled,
And joy and peace are in my heart instead.
They could not stay, you *know*—
Those sad, dark thoughts, when *you* were by my side."
This half evasive answer; that rich tide
Of crimson flaming in her cheek; the tones
Half fond, and half reserved, with which she owns
Joy doth his coming greet,
A strong suspicion in his heart awakes.
His clasp he loosens—in his hands he takes
Her blushing cheeks, and gazing in her face
A moment silently, he smiling says:
"You've dared to doubt me, sweet!
Dared to believe that I could play with you,
And be to love, and to my soul untrue.

What means it? how such doubts have I deserved
Whose heart not e'en in thought from you has swerved
Since that glad night in which
I first beheld this proud, this perfect face,
And lost my heart in one admiring gaze?
My brown-eyed Daisy, tell me what it means
That you *could* doubt me!" On his breast she leans
Her shy face colored rich
With love's enchanting bloom, as she replies
With sweet, gay laugh: "Nay, you are not so wise
Perchance, as you believe. How dare *you* doubt
My faith and trust in you—and this without
One shade of evidence?
What reason have *I* giv'n for such distrust?
As to my tears—well, if confess I must,

I own they came as come some summer showers,
Swift, fierce, yet brief, and like those op'ning flowers
Whose breath steeps every sense
In pleasure exquisite, till we forget
The storm that opened them, the tears that wet
Their fragrant faces as they burst to bloom,
Intensifying all their soft perfume.
Storms needful are, and good!
See how the earth smiles 'neath the grateful tears
The troubled sky is weeping! when appears
Once more the sun, and clouds are swept aside,
The skies a deeper blue will wear; the wide
Green fields, yon tossing wood
Will then a brighter, fresher hue display;
And on that sloping hillside far away
New blossoms wild and sweet will ope their eyes
The glowing world to gaze on with surprise."

"What of the storm within?"
He smiling asks, and bends to see her face.
"Oh, that too, as I said, has given place
To sunshine, and has opened many a flower
Whose closed buds hid their beauty till this hour."

"The storm to you has been
A harbinger of peace and joy?" he says,
And reads the answer in her glowing face.

V.

A happy hour glides by
While they of present, past, and future speak,
Then, while a deeper crimson lights her cheek,
And a last doubt its shadow o'er her throws,
With hesitation shy she says—"And Rose!"

"Well, what of Rose?" His eye

He smiling bends upon her downcast face;
And as he gazes, in his mind apace
A vague suspicion grows: Ah, there then lies
The secret of the storm—the tear-filled eyes,
The crimson cheeks, the lips
Whose quiv'ring broke the sweet mouth's pride-
ful lines
When first he sought her here. He read the
signs
Correctly then; she doubted him; the cause
Dear Rose—poor Rose! A moment's thoughtful
pause,
And then his hand he slips
Beneath the fair round chin, lifts up her face,
And waits till she her conscious eyes shall
raise
To meet his own. Awhile she restless bears
His look intent, then lifts her eyes and dares
Whatever they may meet.

A long, fond glance; then, smiling, "What of
Rose?
Poor Rose!" his kind face graver, sadder grows.
"Poor Rose! life has been stern to her," he says,
"And giv'n her more of pain and bitterness
Than many know, my sweet,
In half a century of troubled years.
Those soft blue eyes familiar are with tears
Such as but few have wept; that gentle heart
Is often filled with pain in every part.
I told you, Marguerite,
How sadly in her youth she was bereft
Of all she loved, and how she came, when left
Alone and desolate, our home to share,
And make it bright with all her graces fair.
I told you how to me
She filled a sister's place, and with my dear
And lovely mother made my home as near
Perfection as could be an earthly home.

We blessed the day in which our Rose had
come
Our joy and pride to be.
Scarce had our bud expanded into bloom,
When one, attracted by its rich perfume
And lovely hues, aspired to pluck and wear
Our dainty blossom; but we could not spare
So soon our treasured flower;
And ere the day arrived when we should place
Our darling in his keeping, Death's cold grace
Lay on his silent lips, and close-shut eyes;
And crushed and broken, as a flower lies
Cut down in evil hour
By ruthless hands, our poor Rose lay that
day,
And saw life's brightness swiftly turn to grey.
Long was it ere she rallied, and took up
Once more its burdens; for the bitter cup
Her gentle lips had drained

Seemed to have poisoned all life's springs, and left
Her utterly of vital pow'r bereft.
But tender care availed, and health and strength
Gave back the color to our Rose at length;
Though in her heart remained
The shaft which death had left implanted there.
But she is brave, and hides the wound with care.
No word of hers the rankling pain reveals
Which even now from life its brightness steals,
As we who love her know.
The hours are many which all darkness prove.
They loved each other with no common love;
Such love as even death cannot destroy."
He clasps her closer, and with chastened joy,
And eyes that tears o'er-flow,
The girl looks up to meet the tender glance
Of him whose every look her heart enchants;
And while her soul with pity deep is stirred

For her whose brief sad story she has heard,
She feels with thankful glow
How good and gracious God to her has been,
And deeper grows the joy her heart within.

FINALE.

I.

ARK to the merry bells!
Upon the slumbrous air flung far and near
Peals out their mellow chiming, soft yet clear;
And as their music floats o'er hill and plain,
All the glad echoes chant a sweet refrain.
With every note that swells
Upon the dreamy air, deep organ tones
Are sweetly blending, — not with plaintive moans,

But with a joyous burst rolls grandly out
The *Wedding March*, and lingers sweet about
The echoing arches high
Upon whose proud support the old church leans.
No need to ask what bell or music means,
Nor why yon altar is a fragrant bower
Enwoven thick of many a snowy flower;
No need to query why
That flutt'ring, gay-robed throng fills up the chairs
Thick scattered through the nave to altar stairs.
But now a hush falls o'er the waiting crowd,
Broke only by a rustle, and the loud
Triumphant organ notes,
As through the wide-swung doors, preceded slow

By ushers decked with favors white as snow,
The fair bride comes with downcast eyes, and cheeks
Whose heightened crimson eloquently speaks
The joy this hour promotes.
Her simple dress becomes her royally;
Her sweet, bright face a pleasure 'tis to see,
As up the aisle upon the arm of him
Who takes her father's place—whose eyes are dim
With pleasure and regret—
She comes, until before the chancel he
Whose wedded wife she shortly is to be,
Receives her, blushing, at his father's hands,
And with her at the flow'r-decked altar stands.
Then softer, fainter yet
The organ's throbbing harmonies become,
And die in silence; all the church is dumb;
Till on the hush in solemn tones and slow

But with a joyous burst rolls grandly out
The *Wedding March*, and lingers sweet about
The echoing arches high
Upon whose proud support the old church leans.
No need to ask what bell or music means,
Nor why yon altar is a fragrant bower
Enwoven thick of many a snowy flower;
No need to query why
That flutt'ring, gay-robed throng fills up the chairs
Thick scattered through the nave to altar stairs.
But now a hush falls o'er the waiting crowd,
Broke only by a rustle, and the loud
Triumphant organ notes,
As through the wide-swung doors, preceded slow

And down the aisle the bridal train retrace
Their steps—while loud and clear
From belfry tow'r the swift, gay chimings swell,
"And all is merry as the marriage bell."

FINIS.

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